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DILYS

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HISTORY OF FORT ST. GEORGE, MADRAS
ON THE COROMANDEL COAST

THE NAUTCH GIRL

THE FOREST OFFICER

A MIXED MARRIAGE

THE SANYASI

DILYS

CASTE AND CREED

THE TEA-PLANTER

THE INEVITABLE LAW

DARK CORNERS

THE UNLUCKY MARK

SACRIFICE

DILYS

AN INDIAN ROMANCE

BY
F. E. PENNY

AUTHOR OF
"THE SANYASI" "CASTE AND CREED" "SACRIFICE" ETC.



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DEDICATED TO

MRS. B. M. CROKER

IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF HER

ENCOURAGEMENT AND

SYMPATHY



D I L Y S

CHAPTER I

THE train drew up in a cloud of dust. Doors were swung open, and streams of brown-skinned travellers poured from the stifling third-class carriages upon the platform.

From a Pulman car Owen Davenport descended with a deliberation that was habitual. He glanced up the platform, and an expression of pleasure came over his face as his eye caught sight of a tall spare figure clothed in kharkee. It was the police-officer of the district, Rex Carwardine, an old schoolfellow and friend of the new arrival. Rex pushed his way through the shouting, gesticulating crowd with good-humoured authority, and the people fell back with hasty deference before "the big Polliss master," as they called him.

"Hallo ! Owen, old man !" he exclaimed, as he gripped the other by the hand.

After an exchange of greetings came the business of collecting the luggage. It was not until

the two men were seated in the strange hooded two-wheeled vehicle, known to Rex's household as the district cart, that they were able to hold any conversation.

"It is good of you to pay me a visit like this. Next best to going home is to get an old friend from home to come and stay with one."

Owen smiled as he glanced at the sunburnt face with its clear grey eyes. Rex had no pretensions to good looks, yet the feminine eye lingered with something like approval upon his features, and men gave him their confidence uninvited.

"I hate wearing virtues that don't belong to me. They make me feel uncomfortable, like other men's clothes. To be honest, I proposed paying you this visit more in my own interests than yours."

Rex laughed outright. "The same old Owen!" he cried, with keen enjoyment at the close touch of far away schooldays. "I remember how you used to say the most outrageous things at Rugby with that saving preface 'to be honest.' We couldn't punch your head for being rude because you claimed such virtue in speaking honestly. Well, what is it?"

There was a slight pause before the reply came.

"An heiress."

"A what?" shouted Rex, bringing his eyes

from the country-bred mare to his friend's fair Saxon face.

"A real *bonâ fide* heiress."

"We don't grow them in these parts," said the police officer, flicking the mare with his whip as she suddenly checked her smooth trot at sight of a village pig by the roadside.

"Oh! yes, you do. I have all the details at my fingers' ends. I may as well tell you at once that she is here—here, in Cuddalore, to the best of my belief, and that I am here to find her and——" he paused, leaving the sentence unfinished.

"Yes, and what else?"

"To be honest——" A laugh from his friend caused him to hesitate. What he was about to tell was not quite fair upon himself, yet there was just enough truth in it to impel a man of his nature to say it. He finished with a jerk "—and to marry her."

"Oh!" And again the eye of the policeman swept the features of his guest.

They were crossing the river, a narrow ribbon of dazzling blue upon a bed of golden sand.

"Pull up a minute, and let me have a look at the country," said Owen.

The river ran eastward to the sea, which was not more than a mile away. The banks were flat, and where the tides and storm-waves did not reach, they were covered with palm-groves and giant grasses. In a cold grey atmosphere the

scene would have been dreary and depressing ; but under the tropical light of a South Indian sun, the landscape was full of colour. The new-comer gazed across the yellow sands at the gleaming water and azure sky until he was well-nigh blinded.

"Over there is the old ruined Fort," said Rex, pointing to the right with his whip.

"Uninhabited in the present day, I presume?"

"Except for myself. My house is built on the earthworks overlooking the river. It is a little way from the cantonment, and has a reputation for fever which it does not deserve. It suits me in more ways than one."

They passed over the bridge, and drove on under the shade of noble trees. Between the cantonment and the sea stretched an open maidan. It was dotted with white tents.

"Troops, I see," remarked Owen. "Are they English or native?"

"English ; they have been sent here from Bangalore to get them out of the way of plague. The commandant is a nice fellow, pleasant and sociable. But I say, Owen, what about this heiress ? Is she native or Eurasian ?"

"Neither ; she is English as far as birth is concerned, and as pure-blooded as I am. It is a most romantic story."

"We will have it when we get in."

They left the white tents behind, crossed a

swampy watercourse, and passed along a smooth carriage-drive between some low mounds, where here and there a piece of broken masonry crumbled half hidden under rank herbage. The bungalow, embowered in trees, looked out upon the still waters of the lagoon. A quarter of a mile away the sea broke monotonously upon a sandy shore, that was peculiarly desolate and deserted. Owen looked round as he climbed down from the dog-cart.

“Where is the Fort?”

“Gone long ago, as far as keep and drawbridge are concerned. All that remains of Fort St. David are these earthworks that you see about the place. Lally’s guns knocked the Fort into a cocked hat nearly a century and a half ago. But come along inside; you must be dying for a drink after the heat and glare.”

It was refreshingly cool within the walls of the bungalow. Curtains of Indian muslin swung to and fro in the moist breeze that blew in from the sea, and there was no need of punkah. Doors and windows opened on to deep verandahs that stretched out into the shade of the long-armed banyan-trees. A shrubbery of crotons and panax bushes nestled close up to the walls of the house, providing a wealth of colour with their gold and crimson foliage and soft feathery green. The sea-breeze brought on its wings the boom of the sea, with occasionally the plaintive cry of a

water-bird. A sigh of contentment escaped Owen's lips as he put down his glass.

"You must amuse yourself till dinner. I have a lot of work to do," said his host, as he left the room for the office.

Dinner was over, and the servants had departed to take their own meal at the back of the house. Owen, extended at full length upon a grass-hopper couch in the verandah, lighted his cigarette in leisurely fashion. His story was yet untold. One thing at a time, was his rule in life. In some respects it was a good rule; it ensured the thorough performance of the task of the moment. But there were occasions when the attention had to be divided, when the grasp had to be right and left, or the opportunity was lost for ever. On these occasions Owen failed where a man of greater readiness would have succeeded. Being possessed of private means, his failures were of no consequence, except so far as his pride was concerned.

"Now about this heiress. I will tell you her story, and then you must give me your help and advice."

"In my official capacity or as a friend?"

"Wait till you have heard what I have to say."

This was the story which he told. There was a Cornishman named Tregethin. He was the younger son of a younger son, and had to work

for his living. Mining was the profession that he chose, and, when his training was finished, he was tempted to accept the offer of employment in a new mine which was being opened up in the Wynaad in South India. He knew nothing about the Wynaad, except what the prospectus of the new mine could tell him. By diligent inquiry he further learned that it was a district in which coffee grew ; that the climate was cool and pleasant, though apt to be feverish at certain seasons. The salary was handsome, and for the present he was to be manager and chief engineer. Under the circumstances Tregethin felt justified in marrying the girl of his choice before he sailed.

The young bride, full of hope and happiness, was charmed with all she saw. Life in camp on the wild hills delighted her. The tropical forest with its wealth of vegetation, the birds and butterflies, and the strange people who gathered round the camp never ceased to interest her. Added to this there was the new bungalow which was being built under her eyes, and which bid fair to become as pretty a house as the feminine heart could desire. It was surrounded by a garden, with a wonderful virgin soil that grew flowers and vegetables as if by magic.

"Captain" Tregethin, as he called himself, after the manner of mining managers, was not quite so well satisfied with his department. The

mine, which looked so well in the prospectus, was in its earliest infancy of shaft-sinking and shed-building. He and his wife were the only Europeans. The rest of his staff consisted of a Eurasian clerk or two, a dozen native maistries, and a couple of hundred coolies. He threw himself into his work, determined that it should not be his fault if it failed. And he wrote frequently to Bombay, urging the more speedy despatch of machinery and plant. The delays were not to be accounted for by the difficulties of transport, and there came periods when, for want of the necessary machinery, he found it impossible to keep his coolies employed.

Time passed, and Mrs. Tregethin, established comfortably in her new house, was happy enough in the prospect of motherhood. There was no doctor within reach, but this did not trouble her nor the busy husband. Attended only by the native apothecary and the ayah, she became the mother of a daughter, whom Tregethin baptized himself under the name of Dilys. For a week all seemed to be going well with mother and child. Then fever suddenly set in, and a fortnight later a broken-hearted husband buried his wife amongst the Persian roses in the garden.

Just at that time some long-expected machinery arrived, and Tregethin was obliged to be at the works all day. He had no leisure to listen to the complaints of the ayah, who wailed over the

ping infant, crying that it would die if a foster-mother was not found for it. There were no native villages nor bazaars within reach—nothing but the mining camp of workers, and though it contained a few women, none of them happened to be qualified for the duties of foster-mother.

The machinery had been brought up by a gang of Lumbadees. They are the gipsies of India, and are also known as Brinjarees. They are a wandering tribe, who do transport work among the hills where there are no roads. Their sturdy little bullocks possess something of the nature of goats in their power of climbing. They pass along wild hill paths and through forests, where the way is nothing but a game track. In the swampy valleys they pick out with unerring instinct a firm footway over the spongy ground. The Lumbadees are great thieves, yet they possess some strange traits of honesty. The fidelity with which they keep their word is a matter of history, and they are scrupulously honest over all goods committed to their charge. They possess a breed of dogs of a sandy or grey colour. The dogs have shaggy coats, and are larger in size than the old-fashioned English sheep dogs. They are not kept by any other caste; like the poligars' animals, though faithful to death to their own masters, they are too ready to fight, and are treacherous and savage towards strangers.

Amongst the gang of gipsies that brought up

the machinery was a young woman who had just lost her baby. The ayah, with the maternal instincts of her race, endeavoured to secure her services. She made the woman a handsome offer of clothes and money to take the situation of amah, and reside at the bungalow for a year. But nothing would induce the gipsy woman to approach the residence of an Englishman. Her husband, she vowed, would kill her if she entered the house. The ayah solved the difficulty by carrying the child to the Lumbadees' camp. The foster-mother took to the little one with all the love that should have been bestowed upon her own. She even gained courage sufficiently to meet the ayah near the house at stated times. Late at night, early in the morning before the cuckoos and barbets had begun to call, the foster-mother was waiting for her charge. But never once did she venture under the roof of the Englishman. Ten days later, when the bullocks were rested, the Lumbadees began to stir. They were anxious to depart, and the foster-mother must needs go with them.

The ayah was in despair; she offered money and jewels; she begged, coaxed, and threatened, but all in vain. The husband would not hear of it. The woman would have stayed, for she had grown fond of the fair-skinned smiling baby; but the tribe backed her husband's decree and made it inexorable. The evening

before the departure of the gipsies, the ayah and the woman had a long and earnest talk. Afterwards the ayah sought her master.

"Sir, the Lumbadee woman will not stay."

"Have you promised money and jewels?"

"Yes, sir, and she would accept them if she could, for she loves the little one; but her people say no."

"Then, what are we to do?" asked the forlorn widower, utterly at a loss to know what course to pursue. The milk of the cows fed upon the rank herbage of the hills would be poison to his tiny daughter.

The ayah looked at him with swimming eyes. "Sir, the baby will die if she loses the Lumbadee mother."

"I know that," he replied irritably.

"But the Lumbadee mother, though she is obliged to go, will continue to give her services if master will let baby go too."

"With the Lumbadees?" he almost shouted in his atonishment.

"It is the only way. And what harm can come if I go with the child? The woman promises faithfully that she will take care of me and the baby, and we will come back in eighteen months with the little missie, a strong English child."

So the ayah pleaded, whilst the distracted father listened. Gradually she conquered his

scruples, and wrung from him a consent given against his better judgment. Poor man! It seemed to him that a cruel fate had left him no choice. It was that, or pronouncing the death-warrant of his child.

The gipsies departed with their picturesque string of bullocks; one animal was loaded with the clothes so carefully prepared by the fingers now lying stiff and cold in the grave under the rose bushes in the garden. Tregethin watched the party with a heavy heart as men and cattle trailed over the hills, dipping into the moist still valleys, climbing by winding paths over the crests of the breezy hills, till the last bright, blue cloth and yellow string of cowries was lost in the distant jungle.

The ayah was faithful to her charge, and three times during the year she brought Dilys to the bungalow, a smiling, crowing, chubby child, afraid of nothing, disposed to be friendly with her delighted father, and as happy as a little jungle lamb. They could only come when the Lum-badees had business that brought them into the district; but Tregethin was satisfied. At the last visit he begged the ayah to stay and dispense with the foster-mother. The good woman, thinking only of her charge, pleaded for a few months more. By that time missie would have teeth to eat food properly, she urged. Tregethin hesitated. Though Dilys was the picture of health,

the ayah had not fared so well. Long tramping over the hills, rough food, and an open-air life, with only a rude tent for shelter, had told upon her constitution. "Better stay," he said. But the ayah was obstinate. "It is for only a little time," she pleaded. So once more Tregethin watched them go in the early morning light, carrying the little Dilys in their train.

A few weeks later, two events happened which curiously affected the destiny of the child. The ayah died when the tribe was on one of its long marches in the western ghats ; and about the same time the mine stopped working for want of funds. Tregethin struggled vainly against fate, hoping that the remittances would arrive ; but instead of these, he received peremptory orders to shut down the works and incur no further expense. When he made known the contents of the letter to his work-people and subordinates, there was consternation and complaint, for all wages were in arrears. He did his best to satisfy the clamouring coolies, and emptied the cash-chest to its last coin. Convinced that there was nothing more to be got they departed in a body. As their voices died away in the distance, Tregethin read a second letter which had been brought by the market coolie. It asked him to come to Bombay to receive the balance of his salary, and directed him to leave a native clerk in charge of the mine.

The following morning he awoke with an

uncomfortable sensation of loneliness. An oppressive silence hung over the deserted shaft; everything was still in the engine-shed; even the bungalow itself was unusually quiet, and his servant omitted, for the first time in his life, to bring the early morning tea. He hastily dressed himself and went out. Every native and Eurasian had departed, fearing starvation; he was absolutely alone in the settlement. When the daily market coolie failed to arrive, Tregethin began to think that he must follow the example of his people. Yet he wished to remain if it was possible. For the sake of the child he must stay. He persevered for a few days; but when the store-room was emptied of provisions, and a whole day was passed on biscuits and a cup of milk, he knew that the end had come, and that he must go too.

He locked the sheds, fastened doors and windows, let loose all the live stock—the six country cows, the goats, and the fowls—saddled his Mahratta pony, and rode away from the deserted mine and from the grave among the roses. He was filled with a feverish anxiety to accomplish his journey, and to get back to the mine in time to receive the ayah and the child on their return from their final wanderings.

But misfortune dogged his heels. At the foot of the hills he sold his pony to buy food and a railway ticket. He could not afford to travel all the way to Bombay by rail, and so did

the rest of the journey on foot, tramping along the dusty sunburnt roads towards the great seaport. It was one thing to live on the hills in a cool climate, but quite another to walk along the heated roads of the plains. The sun affected his health, and when at last Bombay was reached, he was only fit for hospital. In his more lucid moments he spoke of the ayah and his daughter, but the nurse and doctor thought that the delirium of the sun-fever still disturbed his brain. The broken story of the child travelling with its ayah, under the protection of a wandering tribe or Lumbadees was so improbable, so incomprehensible, when other and simpler means might surely have been found to provide for it. They soothed him with smooth promises as they might have comforted a babbling child, and Tregethin died, not unpeacefully, leaving his little daughter stranded in a strange land, and lost amongst a strange people.

Six months from the date when Tregethin had last watched the gipsies depart, they returned, true to their word, to deliver up their charge, for so the tribe considered Dilys. The door of the bungalow was locked and the camp deserted. The engineers and miners, the clerks and coolies were gone, and, worst of all, the master himself had vanished. The bungalow was in possession of jungle cats and bats. The garden and its paths were already in the arms of a vigorous growth of

creepers, and the herbage of the flower-beds had sprung up breast high.

The Lumbadees looked round in blank consternation. If the ayah had been with them they would have taken counsel with her, and she and the child would have sought an asylum at the nearest missionary station. But there was no one to give advice but the foster-mother in whose arms the pretty little English maid nestled fondly. She was devotedly attached to Dilys and had but one course to suggest, the adoption of the child until the father should be found. The gipsies shrugged a careless shoulder and agreed to her proposition. Their share of the bargain had been performed and they had no time to waste looking for the Englishman. Breaking open the bungalow they helped themselves to movable properties, the price of which would suffice to pay them for the keep of Dilys ; and then, without further thought on the matter, they returned to their transport duties amongst the native merchants on the West coast.

Already Dilys's appearance differed from what it was in the ayah's time. Her European clothes so scrupulously preserved by the good woman were replaced by the more convenient cloth worn by the Lumbadee children. The ayah, faithful to her trust, always talked to the baby in English, and taught it a few words of its mother tongue. The gipsy woman knew no English, and only

spoke her own queer language, and the patois of the districts which they traversed between the West coast and the plateau. So the little snow-drop grew up amongst the tawny tiger-lilies,—a gipsy child in everything but colour.

CHAPTER II

DAVENPORT having arrived at this point of his story relapsed into silence as though the tale was ended. Rex handed him the box of cigars and called to his servant to bring sodawater and ice. The sea-breeze blew fresh and cool through the verandah rustling the leaves of the crotons. The flying-foxes quarrelled greedily over the figs on the banyan trees, and from the camp on the maidan came the sound of the distant bugle.

"Well, and has this child turned out to be an heiress?"

"Yes; a mortality in the Tregethin family during the last few years has left her the sole survivor of her generation."

"And now you want to find her?"

"That's it."

"If she is alive."

"Oh, she is alive all right," replied Owen, as he gave his undivided attention to the lighting of his cigar, and then proceeded to superintend the mixing of a whisky and soda. Rex waited, knowing of old that his friend was not to be

hurried. "Yes, she exists right enough. Tregethin had a sister younger than himself, with whom he corresponded at long intervals. He told her of the birth of the child and the subsequent death of the mother. He added that the baby had been put out to nurse, with the ayah to look after it, and that the foster-mother was a gipsy woman. Then followed a long silence, at the end of which she learned that her brother was dead. She wrote to the secretary of the closed mine asking for information about the child, but could get none. A few years later she married. Her husband was the owner of a coffee estate in Mysore ; and chance thus brought her to India and to a district adjoining that in which Tregethin had laboured. No sooner had she arrived than she renewed her inquiries, visiting the hospital where he died, interviewing doctor and nurse, questioning them closely as to his last hours and supposed delirious statements. Then she made a pilgrimage to the mine. The camp was not easy to find, for the jungle had grown to the roofs of the sheds. White ants and rust had been busy in the bungalow and the place was enmeshed with creepers ; not a human soul had visited it for years. The wild pigs and monkeys were in undisturbed possession and seemed likely to remain so.

"She didn't succeed, then, in finding the child ?" asked Rex.

"Mrs. Myrtle was a woman of perseverance.

She went back to her husband's estate nothing daunted, and set her woman's wit to work. With the help of her ayah as interpreter, she questioned every coolie that set foot upon the estate. From a West-coast man she heard of a tribe of gipsies who had with them a fair-skinned child supposed to be a Mahratta or Tyar foundling. These Lumbadees had gone north into the Konkane country, said the coolie, because of some trouble with the police over the smuggling of sandalwood from Mysore to the West coast."

"Those gipsy fellows are born smugglers. I have something to do with them myself between here and Pondicherry, smuggling French brandy and perfumes," said Rex, who was deeply interested.

"Are there any of the tribe here now?" asked Davenport.

"I saw some with a string of bullocks carrying ground-nuts only yesterday. The French ship the nuts—roots they ought to be called—to the Continent to help in the manufacture of salad-oil."

"The Lumbadees were not altogether strangers to the coffee-planter, and at the very first appearance on the estate of their blue cloths and cowrie ornaments, Mrs. Myrtle got speech with them. They consented to be the bearers of a message, should they ever meet any members of the tribe that possessed the so-called Tyar child. The

message was simple but to the point. 'Foster-mother of the Englishman's daughter, keep faith with the father and bring his child to the Chief Magistrate of Mysore city.'

"She should have put it into the hands of the police," said Rex.

"On the contrary, it was the police whom the Lumbadees were endeavouring to avoid ; and her method proved successful. One day the Brahmin magistrate saw a Lumbadee child of about seven years of age standing in his verandah. She talked a strange mixture of gipsy language, Tamil and Malayalum. It was Dilys Tregethin. The Lumbadees had brought her back true to their trust ; but they took care not to show themselves, for they still feared that the police might make it disagreeable for the gang."

"How could Mrs. Myrtle identify her ?" asked the police-officer.

"The gipsies returned with the child some remnants of European clothing and a small gold locket containing a photograph of Tregethin. This trinket the ayah had hung round the baby's neck soon after the mother's death, and it was carefully preserved, probably under the impression that it was a charm of some kind. Mrs. Myrtle was perfectly satisfied that it was her brother's long-lost daughter. Having no children of her own, she took Dilys to her heart at once."

"She must have been a strange little creature to

be suddenly admitted into a well-ordered English household. How did Miss Tregethin take to the new life ? ”

“ She soon settled down and learned to wear English clothing, to eat her food like a civilized being and to speak in her mother tongue. When she was ten years old, Mrs. Myrtle sent her to the nuns at Pondicherry to be educated under French governesses, and she spent her holidays on the estate ; very happy times they were, too, according to poor Mrs. Myrtle’s account.”

“ Apparently you have found your heiress, and she is safely sheltered under the wing of a motherly relative,” remarked Rex.

“ My tale is not quite finished,” replied his deliberate friend. “ At the age of seventeen she left school with a knowledge of French and English as well as the native tongues of her childhood, which, living in India as she did, she never lost. Six months after she left the nuns at Pondicherry she became heiress to a considerable sum of money, her aunt having a life interest in part of it. Now this is the curious part of my story. On coming into this property the Myrtles decided to sell their estate in Mysore and to retire to England, taking Miss Tregethin with them. They made all the necessary preparations, engaged their passages in a steamer sailing from Bombay at a certain date, packed their trunks and arranged

to start on the homeward journey. The very morning they were to leave Dilys was missing. She vanished in a marvellous manner, no one knew where. She left no letter to explain her strange conduct, and she gave no sign previously of her intentions. She simply disappeared off the scenes."

"Surely the police could trace her," said Rex. He had infinite faith in his department.

"It proved too tough a task for the Mysore police anyway. Myrtle and his wife had to put off their journey and they stayed on for nearly a year, turning heaven and earth to find the girl; but to no purpose. Mrs. Myrtle at last became so worn out with anxiety and disappointment that the doctors ordered her home without further delay. There they came to my brother, who is a solicitor, and who is doing the law business for the Tregethin estate, and they told him the whole story which I have just given to you."

"Did he think that she was murdered?"

"We had a suspicion that such might have been the case, though there was no reason why the girl should have met with such an awful fate. Our suspicions have been set at rest on that point."

"Perhaps there was a lover."

"Not that Mrs. Myrtle knew of."

"Was nothing heard of her?"

"Absolutely nothing, until three months ago,

when she came of age. Then my brother received a letter from her directing him to continue the management of her property until such time as she should claim it. It was clear and concise, showing a shrewd knowledge of her position. He sent it to Mrs. Myrtle, who had made up her mind that Dilys was dead, and was becoming reconciled to that idea. It upset her terribly, and she wanted to start for India by the next boat. But she is in a very precarious state of health, and her husband persuaded her to send me instead. So here I am, a barrister not over-burdened with work, under orders to find Miss Tregethin at any cost."

"Did he also tell you to marry her?" asked Rex, regarding his old friend with amused eyes.

"Oh no!" replied the imperturbable Owen. "To be honest, that was quite my own idea."

"What made you think of it?"

"You see, I promised Mrs. Myrtle that I would bring Dilys home with me. 'She won't come,' said that lady, and then she began to cry. Women's tears always make me lose my head. 'I will make her come. If I can't do it in any other way, I'll marry her,' I exclaimed."

"What did Mrs. Myrtle say to that?" asked Rex.

"She just jumped at it, and it comforted her beyond measure."

"You have taken a leap in the dark, old

fellow, and no mistake ! I should be very sorry to call myself the husband of a girl who has had such a strange bringing-up as Miss Tregethin."

"Whatever she may be like, I feel that I am pledged to Mrs. Myrtle, if I can't persuade Dilys to go otherwise."

"You think that the lady will follow you to the other end of the earth if once she is caught in the toils of matrimony ?"

"That is to be seen ; meanwhile I must find her, and you must help."

"If she disappeared in Mysore, I suppose you will look for her there. I don't see how I can be of any assistance, as my district is Cuddalore, which is out of your beat altogether."

"I don't agree with you," said Davenport. He finished his whisky and soda, and rose from the cane lounge with a yawn suggestive of bed.

"Why ?"

"Because of the address to which she directed my brother to send his reply," answered the guest, holding out his hand in good-night greeting.

"And that was——?" Rex's curiosity was mastering every other emotion.

"The letter was to be sent 'To the care of Soobarow, Head Constable, Cuddalore, South India. To be called for.'"

Owen turned towards his room without another word. His long journey had tired him

out, and he did not note the expression of blank astonishment on the face of his companion.

“Soobarow ! What on earth has my most trusted head-constable got to do with Dilys Tregethin, the lost heiress ? ”

CHAPTER III

THE town of Cuddalore on the Coromandel coast is a little more than a hundred miles south of Madras. The district of Arcot in which it stands is mostly flat, producing grain, indigo, sugar-cane and ground-nuts. An old trunk road from north to south passes through the cantonment and town, running parallel with the railway. The scenery has a charm of its own. Avenues of hoary old trees, stretches of emerald rice-fields, gleaming sheets of water, villages, palm-groves and casuarina plantations, with here and there uncultivated patches of rock and cactus, vary the landscape. The tropical sun steeps everything in rich colours, rosy at morn, golden at noon, and purple at sunset. Between the old town and the cantonment runs the Gudalam river, a thread of blue in the dry weather, and a raging torrent of brown muddy water in the rains.

The Europeans employed in the service of Government live in the cantonment on the north side of the river. The old town on the south side is the abode of the native population. In

addition to the Hindoos and Mahomedans, there is a little colony of Europeans and Eurasians. The Englishmen are mostly old soldiers who have taken their pensions and have elected to spend the rest of their lives in the country. The attraction is usually a native or Eurasian wife together with a natural liking for the luxuries of the tropics, a plentiful supply of cheap food and liquor, and cheap servants and house-rent. The poorest European or Eurasian can obtain the services of a kitchen servant in return for his food.

John Brand and Ben Bullen were two pensioners who had adopted this course. They served the Company and afterwards the Queen for many years in the same regiment. Bullen belonged to Suffolk, and the accent of the Eastern counties still hung about his speech, especially in moments of excitement. He had married a native woman who made him an excellent wife, and had borne him a large family.

Brand was bred and born in London, a townsman to the tip of his fingers. In days gone by he had been the smartest sergeant in the regiment. There promotion stopped, for Brand had a little weakness which militated against his advancement in life. To use his own expression, he was occasionally "overtook." It did not happen often, but when it did, he was noisy and troublesome; and though his servant did his best to screen his

master, the truth leaked out, and Brand climbed the regimental ladder no higher.

Bullen and Brand formed a friendship which proved to be life-long. They banded together with four others and shared the services of a native servant whom they called Rammersammy, shortened sometimes to Sammy. He cleaned their accoutrements, and waited on them "just as if they were lords," to quote their own words, and all for the sum of six rupees a month. Ramaswamy attached himself especially to Brand, who undertook to train him. It was admitted by all his comrades that Brand knew better than any of them how a gentleman's servant should behave, having occupied that position himself before he joined the ranks. No one could accuse him of shirking his task ; he spared no pains in teaching Ramaswamy how to brush, clean, and polish, how to fold and put away clothes, and how to lay them out ready for use. Like all native servants, the man was flattered by the unremitting attention and interest shown in his work. He rose to the occasion, and took as great a pride in his success as was evinced by his instructor. He became the smartest "boy" in the barracks, and was the envy of all the other syndicates of masters. If there was one thing in which he excelled above all others, it was in his manner and mode of address. Brand managed to instil into him something of the

quiet alertness of a first-class valet, who anticipates without obtrusiveness his master's wants. And he taught him to use the honorific "sir" freely. It became "sar" in Ramaswamy's mouth, and the sound of it was music in the ears of his masters.

When, in the course of years, one by one of his employers departed, Bullen to be married, and the others with the regiment to England, Ramaswamy remained contentedly with Brand, following him into private life. Wages were at first scantily and irregularly paid, but in addition to the bond of attachment between master and man, there were compensations which made life worth living to the servant grown old in his master's service.

Brand's favourite pursuit was fishing in the Gudalam. The old man might often be seen wending his way to the river, wearing shirt and trousers and a pith hat. His feet were bare, and he carried a large creel slung across his shoulders after the fashion of all enthusiastic anglers. Fishing-rods and a box of bait completed his outfit.

When he went to ask for his mail letters at the post-office on the arrival of the English mail, letters which never came ; or when he walked to the Kutchery to receive his pension, his appearance was very different ; for Brand was a dandy in his way. On retirement from the service in place of the smart uniform of his sovereign, he

adopted a neat suit of white duck, which was as becoming to his dapper little figure as the white drill regulation jacket. The same care was observed in making his toilette as when he dressed for parade. A spotless shirt and collar, a clean suit, and a satin tie were laid out by the careful Ramaswamy, who helped his master into them when the barber had finished his work. The brown canvas shoes were neatly tied; a gold signet ring and a silver-topped cane, produced from some secret hiding-place known only to Ramaswamy, completed the costume, which in Bullen's eyes at least marked Brand as "quite the gentleman."

Having made his toilette, Brand seated himself on a chair in the verandah, and waited until Ramaswamy had assumed a blue cotton coat, a turban of white muslin, and some stiff starched drapery falling in giant folds round his thin old legs. As he emerged from the smoky den at the back of the house, which served as kitchen and dwelling, Brand usually greeted him with the query, "Made yourself quite clean like a gentleman's servant?"

"Yes, sar."

"Then come along, boy." And they started for the Kutchery followed by the admiring eyes of the townspeople, who thought Mr. "Berrand," as they called him, as great a personage as the Government officer himself. The Englishman

walked in front, whilst his servant trotted at a respectful distance behind, keeping sufficiently near to be able to hear his master should he desire to hold any conversation. At the Kutchery he found Bullen, who had come on the same errand.

The two pensioners were well known to Mr. Hensley. He had a liking for them both, and seldom let them go without having a chat. Brand did most of the talking, whilst Bullen listened in admiration of his friend's powers of conversation so far exceeding his own. After signing the receipt, the money was handed to them. Bullen put his into his trousers-pocket in true British style; but Brand, with a lofty gesture, handed the cash to his servant, and then stood at attention in his best regimental manner to hear Mr. Hensley's remarks. Every pay-day the same little scene was enacted with variations according to the time at the disposal of the collector. The topics discussed were the old regimental days, the wickedness of the natives with the general degeneracy of the times, and the increasing impudence of the Hindoos.

Meanwhile Ramaswamy, assuming the dignity and importance of a Treasury peon, squatted on the matted floor of the office and counted the rupees with a precision worthy of a larger sum, arranging the coins into little heaps, which were counted again and again. Having reckoned it up

for the twentieth time he waited for the signal from his master to put it in a grimy canvas bag. Brand and Mr. Hensley continued to chat until a pause occurred, when the old soldier turned to his boy.

"Is the money right?"

"Yes, sar."

"You haven't dropped any?"

"No, sar."

"Nor slipped any of it into that big turban of yours?"

"No, sar."

"You can't trust these natives, sir,"—this to Mr. Hensley, in a confidential tone. "They are so shifty." Then to the boy, "Here, give it to me."

"Yes, sar."

Ramaswamy jingled it into the bag, tied it up, and tendered it to his master, who withdrew his hand as if on second thoughts.

"No, boy, you can carry it yourself," he said, with a magnificent condescension.

"Yes, sar; I keep take care, sar."

As Ramaswamy stowed it away in a hidden pocket of some mysterious inner garment under the blue coat, Brand turned to Mr. Hensley and said—

"I've had this boy for thirty years come next Christmas, sir. He has been a good servant to me. I used to share him with my mates. We had to strap him sometimes, he was such a beggar

for drink." Here Ramaswamy's eyes twinkled with decorously repressed amusement. "But he don't often break out now. He is devoted to me, and I could trust him with thousands of rupees ; he'd never touch one."

During this relation of his vices and virtues, the old man stood wagging his head in cordial assent to all that his master said, as proud as if he were the Governor's own body-servant.

"But he's one among many, he is. The rest of them are cunning shifty devils, cringing before your face, but playing the very deuce behind your back. It's only when you take 'em in hand, as I have took this one, that you can lick 'em into anything that's fit for European service. This one, he's mastered, he is—ain't yer, boy?—and he knows it."

There was a little shower of hearty "Yes, sars" from Ramaswamy, and his head wagged until the muslin turban seemed likely to fall off.

When Bullen described the incident to his wife and daughter afterwards, as he never failed to do, he invariably concluded with the words, "Well, there, Mr. Brand always is such a gentleman, he is."

Mr. Hensley never omitted to address a few kind words to Ben Bullen.

"Is your wife quite well, Bullen?"

Ben's conversational powers were not great, but his wife was one of the topics upon which he

could be eloquent. He had married a native named Mariamah, a name which he had converted into Mary, or more familiarly "Molly, mor." As Brand took credit for the training of Ramaswamy, so Bullen prided himself upon the making of Mrs. Bullen and her excellence as a wife and mother. According to his account, all her domestic virtues had been inculcated by himself.

"She's middling, thank-ye, sir. She is busy knitting me a pair of socks. There, it's the truth I'm speaking, them socks are knitted just as if an Englishwoman had done them. You couldn't tell the difference."

"She makes you a good wife?"

"That she do ; and, excepting for her colour, she might be a European. I have taught her to read a little, and she can cook and sew. Every Sunday she goes to church regular, just as my mother did."

"I am glad she is a Christian," remarked Mr. Hensley.

"She wasn't born a Christian, but I converted her, I did, sir. That took me some time to do it, but I told her she'd go to hell if she didn't come Christian. Her people were very much against it. One day she come to me and she say, "Ben, are you going to hell?" and I said, "No, mor, I ain't going there, and don't you think it." "Then I shan't go," said she. "Well, if that's

so, I had better speak to the Missionary," I said, and I did so that very day. He baptized her in the Mission Church, where I afterwards married her, and he was wonderful pleased with the way I did it. Would you believe it, sir, that I have never took a stick to her, not once, and we have been married twenty-five years."

The two pensioners departed, Brand saluting with the smartness of a young colour-sergeant, Bullen touching his hat Suffolk fashion, and Ramaswamy salaaming low.

On reaching home Brand, with the assistance of his boy, divested himself of his finery, and returned to his usual dress of shirt and trousers. Whatever he might be doing, whether it was fishing in the river or smoking in the seclusion of his own verandah, he wore a pair of clean white ducks. It was his opinion that a gentleman might be known by his nether garments. Shirts did not matter; they might be of flannel or cotton, and there was no style about them. Natives wore shirts; they did not know how to put them on, and looked (as he expressed it), fine objects in them. But trousers were the mark of an Englishman, and clean trousers were the mark of a gentleman. It was no temptation to him, therefore, as it was to his friend Bullen, to wear pyjamas in the house after the manner of Eurasians. When Brand was dilating upon the many virtues and vices of his servant, the black eyes twinkled

at the memory of certain episodes connected with his master's dual garments.

Brand's one weakness has been already mentioned. There were occasions—happily rare—when he was “overtaken.” Bazaar rumour had it that Ramaswamy followed his master's example, but where they procured the liquor was a mystery, the drinking fit not being coincident with the drawing of the pension. The stuff they drank was something better than the coarse, fiery arrack of the country, for it treated them both well, and left little sign behind it. There was a whisper that it was French brandy.

When Brand was under the influence of drink his tongue was loosened, and he babbled of matters which should be kept secret. This was the one anxiety of Ramaswamy's life. In the privacy of the house it did not matter what Brand said, but it was unsafe to allow him to go abroad. Naturally of a reserved nature, like all town-bred men, he was on his guard even when his glib tongue wagged its fastest. But brandy caused him to bare his very soul to the commonest coolie. Therefore his faithful servant was careful to see that his master indulged his weakness in private with locked doors. So long as the boy was present to watch over him, all went well.

Brand in his cups was full of national and regimental pride, and his companion was obliged to listen to long stories of the doings of the

regiment, as he stood behind his master's chair repeating, "Yes, sar ; no, sar ; yes, sar," continuously. The pleasure of being addressed as "Sir," lifted Brand to the very skies on a pinnacle of happiness. When the stories were exhausted, he showed signs of haughtiness, and was inclined to criticise his attendant.

"Rammersammy."

"Yes, sar ! "

"Come here."

"Yes, sar ! "

"You scoundrel."

"No, sar ! "

"But I say——"

"Yes, sar ! "

"——that you are a scoundrel."

"Yes, sar ; no, sar ! "

"Rammersammy,"—with still greater severity.

"Yes, sar ! I thinking master soon made captain now—captain, sar ! Yes, sar ! No, sar ! Master make very good captain, sar ! Ramaswamy plenty proud of master ; yes, sar ! "

Gradually lulled by Ramaswamy's chant, Brand fell into deep sleep. Then it was the old servant's opportunity ; but before indulging himself, he made his master secure by removing the white-duck trousers. In his worst moments nothing would have induced Brand to leave his house without his garments. Usually they were removed after he was asleep ; but there had been

occasions when he showed signs of wishing to go into the town after he had had a little liquor. Ramaswamy was equal to the crisis. Vowing that the dhoby had just arrived, and that the trousers must go to the wash at once, he pulled them off without ceremony, and handed him the cotton garments worn at night. A clean pair of ducks were not forthcoming until Brand was fit to be trusted among his fellow-men again.

With Brand asleep and trouserless on his string cot, Ramaswamy ventured to indulge. A moderate glass of raw brandy was sufficient to make him happy, and he usually recovered long before his master. If, on awaking, Brand demanded more spirit, it was dealt out with a sparing hand ; but no white ducks were permitted until he was quite sober. Like all Englishmen, he was a worm without them. In vain he begged and prayed for the precious article of male attire. It was of no use. He even shed tears, but Ramaswamy was adamant, and swore that they were miles away at the dhoby tank.

Once and once only, Brand, after a glass or two, managed to get into the street ; Ramaswamy being for some reason absent at the critical moment. Furnished with the door-key and a tin plate, the old pensioner wandered down the thronged streets of the bazaar, singing a wild canteen song, and keeping time upon the plate with the key. He soon had a mob about his

heels. He was just in that boastful, self-glorious condition, when he wanted his full mead of "sar." The native boys of the town only hooted and jeered at him, delighted to have the opportunity of baiting a helpless "Tommy."

Ramaswamy came home, found the door open and the bottle on the table. It told its own tale, and, fearing disaster, he rushed out to seek his master. There he was, in the thick of the bazaar, expatiating on the rascality of the natives, and on the excellency of brandy, offering to fight any one who disputed his statement. A group of police peons had gathered near the scene of the disturbance, and were endeavouring to summon up sufficient courage to arrest him. But the arrest of a British soldier under the influence of liquor is almost as formidable a business to a native as trapping a tiger.

Just at that moment an old man blundered up against Brand, and, instead of apologizing, loaded him with abuse. Brand's blood was up in a moment, and he reached out an unsteady hand to grab his assailant, hitting wildly with the other. Ramaswamy dodged the blows, leading his master unconsciously towards his domicile. The door stood open, and an unceremonious push sent Brand headlong over the threshold. The door was quickly closed, shutting out the gaze of an excited crowd, and he was presently extended at full length on his cot. Ramaswamy

suddenly altered his tone, and interlarding his speech with a profusion of "Sar!" and "Dhoby, sar," pulled off the white ducks before the Englishman was aware of his intention.

For this escapade Brand was kept four days in durance vile before Ramaswamy would serve him out a clean pair. Never had the dhoby been so long in bringing back the linen. But never before had Brand given Ramaswamy such a fright. When he was once more sober he wrote a piteous appeal to Mr. Hensley, begging him to use his authority with the dhoby, and oblige the man to return the clothes. He sent the letter by Ramaswamy, who explained matters fully.

"My master too much plenty drinking, sar! I can't give t'ousers till quite well again."

"What has he been doing?" asked Mr. Hensley, much amused with the old servant's method of controlling his master.

"Plenty talking, plenty singing, plenty fighting in the bazaar. Too much bobbery making and polliss giving trouble," was the explanation.

Mr. Hensley laughed, and promised to look in that evening. He found Brand very miserable and depressed.

"Hallo, Brand! What's the matter?"

The pensioner looked sheepish and thoroughly ashamed of himself, as he replied—

"Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I've been overtook."

"This is a serious matter ; you ought to know better than to do such a thing," said Mr. Hensley, with due gravity.

"Yes, sir, that's true," was the repentant reply.

"I thought that you had got over this weakness. How did you manage to be overtaken in this way?"

Brand looked up and down and then at Ramaswamy for help, but he could think of no excuse or explanation. At last he said—

"Well, sir, there you beat me, for I really don't know how I come to be overtook in this way."

"And the dhoby has taken all your clothes, you say?"

"Yes, sir ; that drunken warmint, Ramaswamy, let the man have them all. I can't think what he was about, except that he had been at the bottle, which I, like a fool, left on the table. He's such a beggar for drink. But I'll strap him as soon as I can get my clothes on."

Ramaswamy did not show any fear at this terrible threat. On the contrary, he approached with a smile of confidence, and said—

"Dhoby done bring clothes, sar."

"That's right," said Mr. Hensley, rising to go.

"Now you can dress yourself decently, Brand——"

"Like a gentleman, sir."

"And don't let it occur again. It is such a disgraceful example to the whole town."

Mr. Hensley departed, leaving Brand to make his toilette and resume his national garments.

CHAPTER IV

It was mail day—that is to say, the day on which the weekly English mail was expected. Delivery by the native postman, known as the post-peon, was slow and uncertain. When there was a heavy bag, he used his own judgment in the distribution of it. Having delivered the usual quantity of letters, he was apt to retain the surplus for the next day's round. The English residents of Cuddalore preferred to send their own peons for their letters. Other inhabitants, native as well as Eurasian, who did not possess peons, went in person if they had reason to think that any of their friends had been writing. But the native of India is not addicted to correspondence other than what is necessary to business, and the townspeople of Cuddalore had little business that required the assistance of the post.

On the arrival of the English mail following that which brought Owen Davenport, the customary group gathered round the post-office waiting for the letters to be given out. The belted servants of the judge, the collector, and

other civilians, each bearing a leather post-bag, were seated under the shade of the tamarind tree, leaving the verandah of the post-office bungalow to the Europeans and Eurasians.

"We have visitors," announced Babajee, Mr. Hensley's servant.

"Sent on to your master from Madras by Government?" asked the judge's peon.

"Not this time; they are friends of the Missie. They travelled out on the same ship with her, and being pleasant gentlemen, the Missie asked them to visit her father."

"Perhaps she has chosen one for her husband, instead of the polliss-officer?"

Babajee shook his head negatively. "The Missie laughs too much to be thinking of marriage. She is always making fun. Only yesterday, she turned the laughter of the house against the cook. Even the master smiled when he heard the tale. The cook is a good man, and pleases the master with his dishes. But when all his work is done, he likes his arrack and his pipe as we do."

His listeners wagged their heads in unanimous approval of the sentiment.

"Last evening, after dinner was finished, the visitors, who are strange men with un-English ways, asked if they might have some hot soup at midnight. The Missie took a tin from the storeroom, and went herself to the kitchen to

tell the cook how to warm the soup. By that time he had smoked his pipe, and drunk his arrack. It was not to be supposed that he could understand what the Missie said. She called the ayah. 'What is this?' she asked. That owl of a woman, instead of replying that he was sick with fever, told the Missie that he had been drinking arrack. It was foolish of the cook to deny the woman milk for her coffee."

"Was the Missie angry?"

A broad grin illumined the face of Babajee as he continued—

"Our Missie is never angry. She made fun only. She called me and Marava, and directed us to take the cook to the Pound, together with his mat and blanket, and he slept the night there; the Pound peon having orders not to let him depart until he should pay the fee of a donkey. His wife took the money this morning, and the cook goes about with a ball of fire in his belly. He will not take his ease again for the future until the Missie is safe in bed."

"Why did the strange gentlemen require hot soup at midnight?"

"They are poochee-catchers. They catch beetles and flies of all sorts; flower-flies, fruit-flies, even loathsome creeping-flies and worms, which they shut in boxes and send to Germany. After dinner, they go forth with muslin bags and lanterns. The flies come towards the light

and get entangled in the waving bags. Then they come home and require soup and beer."

"What is the meaning of this madness?"

"Henri, their Pondicherry butler, says that it is done by order of the German Emperor. The flower-flies are to adorn the walls of his daughter's bridal chamber; the loathsome flies and worms are for the manufacture of spells and potions against the enemies of the Emperor."

"Shuh!" said a voice behind them. They turned to see Naga, the police-peon, who held the coveted post of messenger in Carwardine's office. He had come up in time to hear the last sentence or two.

"Ho! Naga, you are late this morning."

"So is the mail," replied the young man. His dark-blue uniform, and neat turban to match, gave him a smart military appearance, of which he was fully conscious; but his pride was literally in his boots. He, only, of all the peons in the cantonment, wore boots. They were large and of heavy regulation make, and they creaked like a cavalry saddle. Naga gloried in their music, which, by an elaborate bending of the foot, he developed to its fullest extent.

"Where is your post-bag?"

"The master is calling for the letters himself this morning."

"Wherefore?" asked three or four of the men at once.

"I know not, so I came to see. He sent me with a note to the Collector's Missie, and I am on my way back. He is dining to-night at your house," he concluded, addressing himself to Babajee.

"Then he will see the poochee-catchers."

"Shuh! they are not only catchers of poochees."

"What are they if not? Surely all day and half the night they hunt for flies."

"There are other things to be found besides flies," said Naga, mysteriously.

"What?" eagerly chorused his hearers.

But the young man would not commit himself.

"That is our business," he replied. "My master has orders to watch them."

"Was the order given by Government?"

"It came by telegraph."

"No such order has been sent through the telegraph, or we should have heard of it from Naraswamy. He writes the messages as the clerk reads them off the machine."

"You know nothing of what goes on in our office," said Naga, contemptuously. "Let every man mind his own works, and see to the weeds in his own garden. The telegrams which my master receives tell the world one thing, but speak to him of other matters. Three mornings ago came a wire from the Commissioner of Police, Madras.

The words were "two nineteen." The master read it, tore it in pieces, and threw it in the waste-paper basket where we found it. 'It was only necessary to watch what was done that day to discover the meaning of the message. As soon as my father, the head-constable, came to the office, he talked with him in a low voice. Later, I saw my father, with two of his men who were without uniform, go towards the Garden House. He spoke to Abdul, the butler, and the men remained to work in the garden and help the tent lascars. Shuh ! What does all this mean but that the police-officer has orders to watch the catchers of poochees, and report what they do and how they pass their time night and day."

A circle of natives had gathered round the peons, and were listening with absorbing interest to the conversation. Amongst them was Ramaswamy, whose master in full dress had arrived at the post-office to inquire for letters. The blue-coated figure took a step forward and asked—

"Where have they come from ? "

"They say they are from Bombay, but their luggage bears railway labels of Lahore, Rangoon, and Pondicherry."

"The world contains but one liar, and that is the human tongue. Their boxes tell truer words than their speech," cried Naga, with a laugh, in which the assembly joined.

The eyes of the old man shone with a bird-like alertness, as he asked if it were possible that the strangers were dealers in wine from Pondicherry. Again the company laughed as Naga replied—

“We do not need their help in that trade.”

There was a rattle in the verandah made by the opening of the shutters of the sorting-room. It was a signal that the mail was ready for distribution. The peons rose to their feet, but held back until the occupants of the verandah had been served. Among these were the two European pensioners, the English orderly from the camp, and three or four other Englishmen of that class, with half a dozen Eurasians. The letters for the troops were handed out, and then Brand stepped forward as if by the common consent of the company.

“Any letters for John Elton Brand, Esquire?” he asked.

“No, sir, not this morning.”

“Not even my newspaper?”

“No, sir.”

“Rammersammy,” called John Elton Brand, Esquire.

“Sar,” came the reply, long drawn out and far reaching. The wiry old figure of the servant who had inquired if the strangers were smugglers from Pondicherry detached itself from the group outside and ran forward.

"Boy."

"Yes, sar."

"There are no letters for the house, and you can go home."

"Yes, sar."

"And prepare tiffin."

"Yes, sar."

Ramaswamy trotted off towards the town in obedience to the orders given, and the business of the post-office, which had been momentarily suspended to watch the familiar little comedy, was resumed. There was an indulgent smile on the faces of the Europeans and Eurasians present. Every mail-day without fail Brand presented himself at the post-office with the usual inquiry for letters. Ramaswamy always accompanied him to carry home the heavy budget which never came. The rest of the company would have felt that something was wanting in the scene if Brand had missed his weekly inquiry. He was generally liked by his fellow-men, including the natives. The antagonistic sentiments to which he gave expression in conversing with Mr. Hensley did not influence his actions, which were—when sober—never otherwise than kind and friendly towards Hindoo and Mohamedan alike. Indeed there were times when they gladly availed themselves of his good-natured services.

Brand withdrew from the vicinity of the window to make room for others, and stood aside,

twirling his carefully kept white moustache and displaying the gold signet-ring. His chum pressed forward.

“Anything for Ben Bullen this morning?”

An envelope bearing an English stamp was handed out. As Ben’s fingers closed upon it, Rex Carwardine pushed his way through the crowd.

“Hallo, Bullen, got a letter from home?”

“Yes, sir, one from my brother.”

“Didn’t know that you had any relations left,” remarked Rex, glancing at the postmark, which was Stratford in Essex.

“I have a younger brother who is still living. Now and again he writes to me; but I haven’t seen him for thirty years or more.”

During the conversation Brand had ranged himself up by the side of his old mess-mate, and stood at attention with a broad smile ready to come into the conversation as soon as an opportunity offered.

“Where does he live?” asked Rex.

“At Stratford, just out of London, because he still feels as if he was in the Eastern counties when he’s in Essex.”

“Has he got a pension, like you?”

“No, he was always cleverer than me. He’s a clerk in an office, and has done very well for himself. He’s more like Mr. Brand, here, though he don’t set quite so much store by his dress.”

Bullen cast an admiring glance at his friend, who beamed in response. Rex had his own reason for continuing his chat ; nothing that went on in the verandah escaped his watchful eye as he thus idly talked.

“Did you receive any letters, Brand ?”

“No, sir ; I was disappointed of my mail this morning. Even my newspaper was forgotten. But it’s of no consequence. When I don’t get any letters, old Ben lets me read his.”

“And when Mr. Brand has a letter and I haven’t, then he passes it on to me.”

Meanwhile the delivery from the window was proceeding fast. The peons were drawing near to receive their bags which had been carried inside to be filled and locked. Among them was Naga, who pressed forward unabashed to hear and see all that he could. Lastly came a few natives, whose correspondence bore the inland stamp. When they had all been served, and the verandah was nearly empty, Brand and Bullen having strolled off together, Rex asked for his tappal. A large packet of official documents was passed out to him. He glanced rapidly through the bundle. There was a letter for Owen, addressed to his care.

“Any letters for Soobarow, my head-constable or for a Miss Tregethin, care of Soobarow ?” he asked.

The clerk searched right and left. “No, sir, none.”

"Are you quite sure that there is not one by the English mail directed to the office to be called for? Look again, please."

The clerk brought the different packets of letters prepared for delivery through the postman, and went carefully over them in sight of the police-officer, but there was nothing for the head-constable.

"Soobarow had his letter yesterday, sir. It was from his wife's brother at Madras, who has been ill. He asked for money," said the clerk.

Such a letter could not be the one for which he was searching, and Rex turned away in perplexity. Owen had assured him that his brother would write without fail to Miss Tregethin by the mail following the one that took him out. The letter addressed to Owen was probably from the brother and would explain. As he was stepping off the verandah Naga approached with a military salute, holding out Miss Hensley's reply.

"Here, take these to the bungalow," said Rex, handing him the newspapers and a packet of official documents, whilst he pushed the private missives into his pocket. "By-the-by, is your father here?" he asked, looking round at the remnant of the crowd.

"No, sir."

"Nor any one except yourself from his house?"

Naga's keen eye swept the group and the approach to the post-office.

“No, sir.”

Carwardine mounted his horse and galloped in the direction of the Garden House, whilst Naga joined the peons, who had slung their post-bags across their shoulders and were waiting at a little distance.

“Did you discover why your master came down to receive his own tappal?” asked Babajee.

Naga, puffed up with pride over the possession of knowledge, wagged his head affirmatively. He was in no hurry to impart his information.

“Speak,” echoed the eager peons, as they moved towards the warm dusty road.

“He came to see what letters there were for my father.”

“Why should he look into the water-pots of his own waterman?” asked Babajee.

Naga laughed as he replied, “Let him look! He will find naught but water drawn from his own well.”

“There was no letter for the head-constable?”

“None; did it not come yesterday? and do we not all know the contents? My uncle has been ill, and wants money. The clerk told him about it, and what it contained.”

“Did the clerk also say that it came from Pondicherry?” asked the judge’s peon.

“Shumah! Is the man a verandah crow that he should tell all that he knows, instead of only

that which is necessary to satisfy the master? He said that the letter came from Madras, and his words were believed."

There was a chorus of laughter led by the light-hearted Naga, and the peons went their different ways, Naga's boots sounding in the distance as he leisurely tramped towards the old ruined fort, the bundle of letters wrapped in a red-cotton handkerchief.

Half an hour later Rex rode up the carriage-drive. He found his friend in the garden, under the shade of the banyan trees, enjoying the fresh morning air.

"Here is your letter, Owen. I went to the post-office myself to see what the mail brought. There was nothing for Miss Tregethin nor for Soobarow."

Devonport broke the seal and glanced eagerly through the pages. Presently he exclaimed—

"That's odd—most strange! Are you quite sure that there was no letter addressed to the care of Soobarow?"

"Quite; I must have seen it if it had been there. The mail was spread out without any secrecy. Your brother doubtless altered his arrangements."

"On the contrary, he says, 'I am despatching by this same mail my letter to Miss Tregethin addressed according to her directions. You ought to be able to trace her with Carwardine's

assistance. I have mentioned Mrs. Myrtle's anxiety, and have begged her to communicate with you and with her aunt, if only to set Mrs. Myrtle's mind at rest. Don't do anything to prevent the delivery of the letter; but find the girl if you possibly can.' Well, old chap, what do you say to that?"

"We will have breakfast, and then we will see what a surprise visit to Soobarow's house will do," replied the police-officer as he strode into the bungalow and called for the morning meal.

CHAPTER V

THE old ruined fort at Cuddalore is a relic of the past. Before the English obtained a foothold upon the Coromandel coast, a rich Hindoo merchant fixed upon the spot, where it stands, for the erection of his warehouses. He threw up earthworks to protect himself from robbers, and mounted some cannon upon the rude fortifications to keep the marauding horsemen of the Mahrattas at a distance. His country ships came over the river bar with merchandise from the Ganges, from Siam, from Ceylon, and even from China and Persia. The goods were sent inland by the aid of the Brinjarees, and a lucrative market was found on the plateau of Mysore.

Then came the Dutch and English merchants, disputing, with commercial jealousy, each other's right to be there. The Hindoo merchant's descendants, alarmed at the approach of fresh hordes of Mahrattas on the land side, and of a strange white people from the sea, packed up their wealth of gold and jewels accumulated by their father, and departed South, where they

would be secure from foreign traders and inland thieves.

When the English merchants asked, at the end of the seventeenth century, for a domicile in Cuddalore, the reigning Rajah offered them the deserted fort. They readily agreed to pay the sum demanded, in exchange for which they were to have the ruined warehouses and fortifications which surrounded them, together with as much land as could be covered by "random" cannon-balls fired from the ramparts.

The chief gunner, with his guns of longest range, was sent over from Fort St. George, Madras, and was directed by the shrewd old merchants of the East India Company to enclose as much land as possible with his "random shot." The shot were marked down and the boundary line drawn. The villages thus enclosed are still known as the "Cannon-ball villages."

The fort was repaired and strengthened. Warehouses and dwellings were rebuilt. Quarters for a garrison were erected, and a market was opened for the products of the district. The walls echoed to the sound of the bugle, the hum of busy voices, the chant of stalwart porters, and the grunt of the transport bullocks belonging to the gipsies.

On the coast between Cuddalore and Madras lies the French settlement of Pondicherry. The eyes of the French merchants turned greedily

upon the prosperous English traders ; Dupleix, the ambitious Governor of Pondicherry, dreamed dreams of greatness, which at one period seemed likely to be realized. At his bidding Lally, with his troops, appeared before Cuddalore in 1758, and took the town and the fort.

Before the end of the eighteenth century Fort St. David was so damaged by the varying fortunes of war, that it was considered beyond repair ; and the twentieth century finds it a mere mass of ruins, partially hidden under rank vegetation. The earthworks remain with their old casemates and bomb-proof rooms. Subterranean ways run completely round the fort under these earthworks. At short intervals galleries, which formerly led to powder-chambers, branch off from the encircling passages. It would require a bold man indeed to penetrate their unilluminated depths. Here and there the masonry has fallen, blocking the way ; but it forms no impediment to the present inhabitants, the snakes, rats, scorpions, bats, lizards and centipedes, that have the tunnels all to themselves.

The only bungalow built upon this once busy spot was occupied by Rex Carwardine. It stood upon the south-east bastion, facing the river. Trees of a century and a half old clustered round it, and a wild tangled garden of flowering shrubs and plants stretched from the very walls of the house down to the rank marshy growth that bordered

the river. The carriage-drive passed out on the north side, where there had formerly been a massive gate and guard-room.

As Rex and Owen drove through the opening to reach the road on their way to Soobarow's house, they passed the two pensioners, who were turning into the fort. The figure of Brand in his fishing costume was familiar enough to the police-officer, who frequently caught sight of him strolling about with his bundle of fishing-rods on the banks of the river below the garden, or upon the opposite shore where the cocoa-nut palms fringed the water. He was usually accompanied by his servant, who carried a large basket on his head to hold the fish. To-day Brand had made no change in his dress. Both he and Bullen wore the same suit, in which they had called at the post-office a couple of hours earlier.

Rex pulled up with an inquiring glance. "Were you coming to see me?" he asked.

"N-no, sir," replied Bullen, with a slight embarrassment of manner.

"You are not going fishing to-day, Brand?" he continued, glancing at the signet-ring and malacca cane.

"Not this morning; but I shall be out on the river this afternoon. We are just strolling round for a chat and a smoke; and I am going to show this lazy beggar where I catch the eels he's so fond of. It's down by the south-east corner of the

Fort, near where the river goes into the sea, not very far from your house, sir."

"If you take any good sea fish, Brand, I should be much obliged if you would let me have a dish. But I don't care for anything that comes out of the river, as you know."

Brand's eyes twinkled and the fragment of a smile hovered under his moustache.

"There are as good fish in that river as ever came out of the sea, and they give a great deal more sport than the sea fish. I could sell half a hundredweight a day to the fellows in camp, if I had the time to catch them. They're wonderfully fond of fish, aren't they, Ben?"

His companion, who was lost in admiration of his friend's flow of speech, allowed his lips to widen into a grin of amusement, as he replied—

"Ah, bor; you're right. They fare as if they couldn't live without Mr. Brand's fish, sir," he concluded, summoning up his courage to take a part in the conversation.

"What's the matter with the river fish?" asked Owen.

"They have a muddy flavour," answered Rex.

"They don't all taste alike, sir; and if you take a drop of brandy with them, you can't taste the mud in the least," said Brand, addressing himself to Davenport.

"I wish there was no such thing as brandy in the world," remarked Rex, as he drove on and left

the old soldiers chuckling with amusement. They watched him out of sight before they continued their way.

“Why should you dislike its existence?”

“It is giving us no end of trouble with the troops. How those men in camp manage to get hold of it puzzles us all. Men, who were perfectly sober before they came here, have been found quite overcome. Major Adamson is much annoyed and worried, as it sends so many men into the hospital tents, to say nothing of the guard-room.”

“Why does it send them into hospital?”

“They are overcome and lie down to sleep where the sun falls upon them; then they have fever and liver.”

“The supply should be stopped. Where do they get it?”

“That apparently is a mystery. Of course some is taken at the canteen and some at the arrack shops in the bazaar; but we cannot find any cases of excessive drinking at either places. If the men have nothing more than they buy there, all I can say is, that they must have uncommonly weak heads, if they are upset to the extent Major Adamson reports!”

“What have you to do with it?”

“He has asked me to set a watch upon the men and on the places they frequent; but, so far, I can find out nothing—absolutely nothing.”

A victoria passed with the hood up. A girl leaned forward and waved her hand.

"By Jingo! What a pretty woman! Who is she?" asked Owen.

"Miss Hensley, the daughter of our Collector."

"Oughtn't I to go and pay my respects to the Collector?" asked Davenport, gravely.

Rex laughed, as he replied, "You will see her to-night. We are going there to dine. But I warn you that it is of no use to lose your heart in that direction."

"Is that so?—and who is the lucky man?"

"I am," answered Rex, calmly.

Owen glanced at him with some curiosity. "To be honest, you don't look——" he paused, feeling suddenly as if he were on delicate ground. His companion concluded the sentence without any hesitation.

"—— like a man who is in love. But I am in love all the same."

Owen was uncomfortable at the turn taken by the conversation, not being at all anxious to become the recipient of confidences. But Rex, seasoned by long residence in small Indian stations, was quite accustomed to discuss his own and his neighbours' affairs. His engagement was known, and there was no mystery about his future. He continued pouring information into the ears of his unwilling hearer.

"We are not going to be married just yet. Her mother being dead, she has to keep house for her father, and he can't spare her for a while. At present I have so much district work that I am content to leave matters as they are. I am out camping more than half the year, and I don't think that she would care for the life."

They drove on in silence till they reached the town. Soobarow occupied a house in the same street as that in which Bullen lived. Bullen's dwelling, like Brand's, formerly belonged to a European in the service of the Company. It stood in a small compound enclosed by a low wall. The front door and lower window were engulfed in a deep verandah. Never very airy in its palmiest days, its dimness was increased by the screens and bamboo blinds put up by Mrs. Bullen in native fashion to ensure privacy. In Ben's words, it was done to keep out the rudeness of the natives, for whom he had the same theoretical contempt as was exhibited by Brand. Soobarow's house was thoroughly native in its architecture and plan. In the centre was the usual courtyard, upon which the rooms opened. When the street door was closed a more complete privacy was obtained than Mrs. Bullen could compass with all her screens.

Mrs. Bullen and the head-constable's wife were sisters, though the fact was not generally known. The anglicizing of the former had partly

destroyed the intimacy of the sisters. Perhaps if there had been no rising generation, they might have been on a more intimate footing. But Bullen's olive-complexioned family posed as Europeans, and domineered over their darker cousins. This did not prevent them from playing together as children, and sharing each other's toys. As they grew older, the younger Bullens went to the English school, where they occupied forms, and wrote copies in copy-books with ink. Soobarow's children attended a school kept by a native. There they sat upon the floor, and acquired the art of caligraphy by tracing letters in the sand. The difference in the methods of education only increased the jealousy which existed between the young people. As they grew up to man and womanhood the breach widened, and though the intercourse between the two families did not cease, the children of Soobarow found that the circumstances of their cousins' birth kept them at a distance.

No one felt this estrangement more than Naga, who from his earliest boyhood had been the devoted admirer of Daisy. When she put herself into flowing muslin skirts and bright-coloured ribbons, his heart sank whilst it fluttered within him. She was so beautiful, yet further removed than ever from his plane of life.

Rex drew up before the door of Soobarow's house, and called aloud to announce his presence.

His shout was answered by the appearance of one of Naga's small brothers.

"Where is your father?" asked Rex, in Tamil.

"He has gone on his round, sir," was the reply made by an intelligent boy with a pleasant manner of address, which he had picked up from the Bullen family.

"How are you to find out if they have any visitors? Can you go in and see?" asked Owen.

"I am afraid not, unless there was any urgent necessity. Mrs. Soobarow is not *purdahshin*, but she would consider it highly improper to receive a gentleman visitor." He turned to the boy again. "Who have you here just now?"

"My mother and sister. The others are at school, but they will be home presently."

"Did the postman bring your father a letter this morning?"

"No, sir; but he brought one yesterday, which was from my uncle."

"Have you had any visitors lately?"

"No one except Mr. Brand, who called this morning to ask which way my father had gone. Father does not always take the same round, as perhaps your honour knows.

Rex questioned the boy further, but could learn nothing more, so, turning his horse's head, he proceeded up the street. As he passed Bullen's

house he caught sight of Daisy peeping out from behind the verandah blind. She had been drawn there by curiosity, as her ears caught the sound of his horse's hoofs. She smiled and nodded as she said, "Good morning, Mr. Carwardine," with a fairly correct English accent. He pulled up, struck by a sudden thought.

"Good morning, Miss Bullen; is your father at home?"

"No, he is gone out walking with Mr. Brand; but if you will come in and see my mamma, she will be very pleased."

The police-officer accepted her invitation for himself and his friend. Daisy drew the bamboo curtain aside with a plump soft hand, on which shone rings and bangles. She was daintily though inexpensively dressed, and her hair was neatly done in modern European fashion. Owen, who always had an eye for a pretty girl, gazed at her with approval and some surprise. They penetrated the shaded verandah and passed into the apartment called by Ben the parlour. A round table stood in the exact centre of the room. It was covered by a bright green cloth, in the middle of which was a vase of native-made paper flowers—impossible roses of red, blue, and white. Round the room were arranged a small sideboard and half a dozen chairs with symmetrical precision. The walls were adorned with coloured lithographs representing rural scenes in England, which Ben

assured his family were exactly like the places he had known in his childhood. These crude landscapes were all that his children had besides his own description to guide them to a knowledge of the native land of their father. With unconscious pathos they spoke of the land as "Home."

Daisy left her guests to summon her mother, who followed her daughter almost immediately into the room. Mrs. Bullen wore a print frock, simply made, and over it was draped a white muslin cloth native fashion. Advancing towards the Englishmen with outstretched hand, she greeted them warmly in a slightly foreign accent.

"You do not often pay me a visit, Mr. Carwardine. What a pity Mr. Bullen is out. He will be so sorry to miss you. Daisy told you that he was out walking with Mr. Berrand?"

"Yes, and I remember that we met him as we drove here."

Mrs. Bullen laughed. "Oh! that Mr. Berrand! My! How fond he is of fishing! He said he would show Mr. Bullen where he caught the biggest eels. Have you tried them curried, Mr. Carwardine? My! But they are good!"

"Never," replied Rex. "I hope that your husband had good news from home this morning."

"Yes, I think it was all right. Daisy, you read the letter. What did your uncle say?"

Mrs. Bullen was proud of her husband's

English relatives, and often regretted that there were not more of them.

"My uncle wrote that he was quite well, except for rheumatism. My pappa says that he ought to come out here and pay us a visit, then he would get rid of his rheumatics."

"But, child, he cannot leave his appointment. He is a writer in an office in London, Mr. Carwardine. Would you like to see the letter? It is somewhere in the room. Find it, Daisy, and let Mr. Carwardine see how nicely your uncle writes."

Daisy rose obediently, and produced a large envelope from between the leaves of the family Bible lying in a conspicuous place upon the green cloth. In the dim light of the screened room Rex could just decipher the neat clerkly hand. The document was of no interest except to the Bullen family, and he returned it to Daisy.

Just as they were about to depart, there was a sound of footsteps on the verandah.

"Any one at home?" asked a pleasant English voice.

"Oh my! It is Mr. Spring and Mr. Barnes from the Camp!" cried Mrs. Bullen, excitedly. Her head was in danger of being turned by the number of her European callers. She felt herself immeasurably superior to her sister down the street, to whom no such social delights were permitted. "Ask them to walk in, Daisy," she

continued, in close imitation of her husband's company manners. "The gentlemen from the Camp often pay us a visit. I am very glad to see them, because my children find it very dull here. They have few companions, and they are pleased to see any one from home."

As Mrs. Bullen concluded, two well-set-up English corporals walked in. Daisy's eyes lingered upon their smart uniforms with open admiration as she gave them chairs. The young men seated themselves in awkward silence. The presence of the police-officer was disconcerting, and kept them tongue-tied.

"I must be getting back to office, Mrs. Bullen. I suppose that you have not had any lady visitors lately, strangers or otherwise?" said Rex, as he shook hands.

"No, we never have any lady visitors, except those who live in Cuddalore."

"Did you ever hear of a Miss Tregethin?"

"Daisy, have we ever seen Miss Treegetheen?"

"No, mamma, she has never been here."

"You haven't seen a strange English lady passing down the street?"

"Oh! my! no!" echoed mother and daughter.

As soon as the gentlemen had disappeared the tongues of the soldiers were loosened.

"What did the police-officer want?" asked

Corporal Barnes of Daisy, as she came back from the verandah, where she had politely escorted her guests at their departure. The question was prompted as much by jealousy as curiosity.

"They came in to have a chat in a friendly way, just as you have done," replied Mrs. Bullen for her daughter. "Get out the glasses, Daisy; perhaps the gentlemen will have something to drink."

A decanter and a couple of glasses were produced from the cellarette of the small sideboard. Daisy poured out a glass for each and replaced the decanter in the cellarette.

"Here's to you, Miss Bullen," said Corporal Barnes, in his best style.

"Thank you, Mr. Barnes, the same to you," replied the smiling Daisy, accepting his attentions with simple pleasure.

Presently she relieved him of his empty glass, and he turned to Mrs. Bullen with shy diffidence, saying—

"I have brought a little present for Miss Bullen, which I hope you will allow her to accept."

The scene had been previously rehearsed as Barnes and his friend walked to the house.

"Pull it out, Barnes," said Corporal Spring, with approval and encouragement; his friend was doing it "slap up to the mark," to use his own expression.

From the depths of his sleeve, which was

securely stopped by his handkerchief, Barnes produced a small parcel and handed it to Mrs. Bullen. Daisy's heart fluttered as her mother opened it, displaying a gold brooch set with turquoise.

"Oh, Daisy! What will your pappa say? You are a lucky girl. It is kind of you, Mr. Barnes; but you should not spend your money over my girl in this way," cried Mrs. Bullen, delightedly.

The young corporal blushed with pleasure, and his eyes devoured the pretty Daisy as she fingered the treasure, and by-and-by placed it in the laces at her neck. Her mother also watched her, but with different thoughts. She had her ambitions for her child, and Corporal Barnes came near to fulfilling the highest of them.

After further chat the two men took their leave, promising to come again soon. Daisy accompanied them to the entrance, and pulled aside the bamboo curtain. She stepped out into the broad sunlight, and her white draperies gleamed with dazzling brightness. Barnes glanced at the brooch which nestled in the little frills beneath her smooth round chin.

"You do look nice in that brooch, Miss Bullen," he said, as he held her hand.

The girl's eyes softened as she returned his glance.

The couple were too much engrossed to see Naga, who was at that moment passing down the

street on his way home to dinner. The police-peon, however, took note of every detail, and his handsome features clouded suddenly with a scowl of jealous anger as he caught the expression on their faces. Yet why should he mind? And what business was it of his to trouble himself about his cousin's love-affairs? Marriages between native men and Eurasian women were not approved of by either community. He was fully aware that Daisy's father would sooner see her dead than united to himself, even though he was her own cousin. Besides the difference of race, there was another bar to any such union. Daisy was a Christian, whilst Naga followed the faith of his father, who was a heathen.

CHAPTER VI

"WE have not met with much success so far," remarked Davenport, as he and Rex drove towards the cantonment. "I suppose that the attraction to the soldiers is that nice little half-caste girl."

"Undoubtedly ; Bullen encourages them for the girl's sake, and he enjoys the companionship of people of his own profession and nation. He and Brand are both popular in the camp. I see Brand with one or two of the men now and then down by the river, instructing them in the gentle craft."

"What can have become of my brother's letter to Miss Tregethin ?" asked Owen.

"If it came, it must have been stopped in the post-office here by one of the clerks. Why not write yourself to the address ? Tell her of Mrs. Myrtle's illness, and ask for an interview."

"So I will. Say nothing to your head-constable, and we will see what happens."

Rex touched up the mare with his whip. They were halfway between the town and the cantonment, and had just come in sight of a small

party of gipsies, who were hurrying their laden animals toward the camp. Rex overtook them just before they reached the tents. He pulled up sharply, and his horse-keeper, at a sign from his master, ran to the mare's head. At sight of the Lumbadees the police-officer had come to a sudden decision.

"Get down, Owen ; this is an opportunity not to be lost. I shall catch the scoundrels red-handed. Unless I am very much mistaken, they are carrying smuggled liquor to the camp."

As he spoke he jumped out of the cart, followed by his friend. The gipsies endeavoured to hurry their bullocks forward, but Rex placed himself in front of the frightened animals.

"Now then, my men, let me see what you have got in your packs," he said in Tamil.

Placing their hands together they began to whine in chorus—

"Sir ! sir ! We are poor men only, and we are carrying cotton for the English soldiers to make pillows in their camp. Please excuse, and let us go on ; we are in a hurry."

"First let me look at the cotton," said Rex ; his voice was even and good tempered, but had a tone of command in it.

A strong young gipsy took a step forward from the group, and constituted himself spokesman.

"If your honour will place a hand upon the

bags, the cotton may be easily felt." He pushed his animal within reach of Rex.

"Open the bundle," was the reply.

"There is no time to open, your honour. The hour of the promised delivery of the cotton is already past, and we must hurry as fast as our tired bullocks can go." There was an obstinate expression on the man's face as he spoke, and the words were uttered in a dogged tone of resistance, which roused the suspicions of the police-officer still further.

"Unload this bullock, and let me see what you are carrying besides cotton."

There was no movement to execute his orders on the part of the Lumbadees, who were watching their spokesman in sulky silence. Rex drew a knife from the pocket of his jacket, opened it before the gipsies were aware of his intentions, and severed the thongs which held the packs. As they fell to the ground there was a murmur of dismay, but none dared to interfere. Carwardine leaned over one of the bags of wool and ripped it from one end to the other. The white cotton, released from the confining pressure of the sack, fell away. Rex plunged his hand into the yielding mass and produced a bottle of French brandy. There were five more bottles concealed with the first.

"Caught at last!" he cried, as he grasped the arm of the young Lumbadee.

Without a word of warning the gipsy flung himself violently upon the police-officer, who was overbalanced and thrown to the ground. Owen, ready for something of the sort, wrenched the infuriated Lumbadee away just as his fingers were about to close over Rex's throat. The Lumbadees looked dangerous for a moment or two. Then one of the older men said something in gipsy language, and their expression changed as if by magic. Two of them laid restraining hands upon the rash assailant and held him whilst the old man spoke.

"Sir, it is all a mistake, and he has brought shame upon us by lifting his hand against the officer of the Sircar. Follow us now to the camp and hear what the sergeant has to say, to whom the cotton and the liquor have been sent."

"Bring that fellow along with you," replied Rex, as he brushed the dust from his uniform and got into the cart. "It is just possible that the sergeant may be able to clear these fellows of blame, but I shall have to punish that young firebrand," he remarked to Owen as they drove slowly on, followed by the Lumbadees and their bullocks.

"Have you ever been attacked like that before?"

"Never; though I have been told that the tribe has been grumbling at the close supervision that I have lately enforced. My constables have

been stopping them on the Pondicherry road ; but somehow they have not been able to bring any charge against the Lumbadees that would make a case. I must let justice take its course against this young man. If I allow the assault to pass, they will take fresh courage and attack me in force one day, when they meet me alone in the district. One has to be very firm and just with a half-tamed people like these."

On arrival at the camp the canteen-sergeant was summoned to explain the situation.

"Are you expecting any wool to make pillows for the men ?" asked Carwardine.

The sergeant glanced from Rex to the gipsies at a loss for an answer. As his eye caught sight of the bottles of brandy, the colour mounted to his brow. The old Lumbadee pressed forward and handed him a paper. His brow cleared as he read its contents.

"I am expecting some brandy, sir ; six dozen for the canteen. I see that the coolies have had an accident with one of their packs. I hope there are no bottles broken."

Rex was slightly taken aback. "Where is the invoice ?"

The sergeant went into the tent, and returned with a paper which he tendered to the police-officer. It purported to be an invoice from a native shopkeeper in Madras, advising the despatch of six dozen bottles of brandy as directed.

"I think you will find it all right," said the sergeant. "I can show you the order signed by Major Adamson."

"If the liquor comes from Madras, and the major knows all about it, I need not do anything more. I felt sure, when the men would not tell me what they were carrying, that they were smuggling something from French territory. Why do you have it up from Madras in this way? Surely it would be quicker and cheaper to send it by rail."

"We have so many breakages by rail when ordering from these native merchants. They don't know how to pack. It takes a little longer, but it is just as cheap to get it up by the Lumbadees. The bottles are handed over to them without the trouble of packing; they bring them in their own way, usually packed in cotton like this, and we have never lost a bottle. I give them a trifle for the cotton-wool, as the men are glad to have it for pillows."

Rex looked at the gipsies, whose faces were losing the sulky look with which they had been overcast.

"You were stupid fellows not to tell me what you were carrying. All this trouble might have been saved if you had but spoken. You can go, but I shall bring that man before the magistrate for his violence. A few weeks in jail will be a lesson to him."

The gipsy was handed over to two police-peons, who were on duty near the camp, with directions to take him to the police-station. Rex and his friend drove away quickly, as it was nearly lunch-time.

The sergeant smiled, and then winked at the retreating cart. "A bit too hasty, young man; you won't catch them like that," was his apostrophe, as he gazed at the sun-lit cloud of dust that covered their retreat. Then he turned to the Lumbadees, who were busy taking out the contents of the packs, and directed them to bring the brandy into the store-tent. With their assistance he packed it at the bottom of a large wooden case. Paying the old Lumbadee for the transport, he dismissed the men. As soon as they had departed, he hastily placed the cotton over the brandy. On the top of the cotton he put a layer of empty soda-water bottles. When Major Adamson looked into the tent the next morning, he saw nothing but a case half full of empties waiting to be refilled by Corporal Barnes, who worked the soda-water machine.

The end of the day found Bullen taking his ease in the verandah of his house. He smoked a long clay pipe known as a churchwarden. His wife sat near him, with her knitting, of which he was so proud, lying upon her lap. Daisy, having superintended the washing up of the supper things, was lighting the lamp in the

sitting-room, which opened on to the verandah. There had been an excellent curry for supper, much appreciated by the whole Bullen family, excepting the master. For him a dish of fried fish had been prepared. He objected, with British prejudice, to curry more than once a day.

"Molly mor, what did he say her name was?" he asked after a long silence.

"Treegetheen, Terreegetheen; do you know the lady, Mr. Bullen?" His wife preferred to address him in this manner; she had the native prejudice against uttering her husband's baptismal name. As Bullen did not reply, she continued, "It was lucky that Daisy was wearing her new dress to-day when Mr. Barnes called. He thinks a great deal of our Daisy. Perhaps if you ask him to come often enough he will marry her."

Two or three of the younger Bullens had joined their parents and were seated on the steps, the bamboo blind at the entrance having been rolled up as soon as the sun set.

"Oh, Daisy girl! You will be a fine lady," cried one of her younger brothers. "Pappa, do you think they will let me join your old regiment when I grow up?"

Bullen took his pipe from his mouth, and let his eyes rest on his offspring with critical gaze.

"What do you squat like that for, Tommy? You sit just like a native. How often have I told you to let your feet hang down like an

Englishman, and not tuck 'em under you as if you were a boy out of the bazaar."

Tommy brought his feet quickly from beneath his small body, and dropped them to the level of the next step.

"Would they let me enlist as you did, pappa?" asked the lad.

Bullen shook his head. "They won't have any colour in the ranks, if they keep things up to the mark as they used to do. They don't mind it sometimes in the married quarters; but it isn't every colonel who will stand that. Colour in the ranks spoils the look of a regiment."

The faces of his sons fell; but their sister spoke words of comfort.

"What do you boys want with a regiment? You get on with your books, and pappa will get you into Government service. Oh my! What good would you be if you had to fight, Tommy? and you, Jimmy boy? You would run away."

Bullen glanced at his daughter and laughed. He was proud of his Daisy, and firm in his belief that she would be an acquisition to the married quarters of any regiment, in spite of her touch of colour. His eye caught the glint of gold in the lace at her neck.

"Let me look at the brooch given to you by Corporal Barnes."

She removed it from her dress and handed it

to him. As he was examining the blue stones Brand walked in. He nodded to his chum, and shook hands ceremoniously with the rest of the family, down to the smallest Bullen on the steps.

"Thank you, my dear," he said, in his best London style, when Daisy pushed a chair forward. "I remember when I handed a chair to her ladyship, the Countess of Tamworth—she and her noble lord had looked in to see my gentleman, just as I have dropped in this evening—she broke off in her talk to say, 'Thank you,' just as gracious as if a duke had given her the chair, instead of a valet."

"That's real manners, that is, together," remarked Bullen, comprehensively to his family.

"What did you reply, Mr. Berrand," asked Mrs. Bullen, who was much impressed, and felt herself in touch with the highest circles of English life.

"I bowed slightly like this, and I said, 'Thank *you*, my lady;' and then I took a step or two backwards, as the lords do when they're waiting on Royalty, like this—and then I left the room."

"He knows how things should be done, he does," remarked Bullen to his family.

"I have never seen a countess; is she like the Queen? and does she wear a crown of diamonds?" asked Mrs. Bullen.

"Her ladyship was just as simply dressed as

Daisy is at this very moment, in a white frock, all muslin and lace ; the only ornament she wore was a gold brooch set with blue stones, very much like the one that you have in your hand, Ben."

Daisy felt a glow of pride as she listened to this description, which ended by likening herself to one of the great ladies of England.

"This brooch was given to our Daisy by Corporal Barnes this morning," said Bullen, as he passed the jewel to Brand. "He must be a steady saving young fellow to be able to buy a thing like that. The brooch must have cost a lot of money."

"Barnes is doing very well, and he is not a man to allow himself to be overtook.—Yes, thank you, Mrs. Bullen, I should like a drop, just the least little drop, to show my good will.—He helps the canteen-sergeant, keeps the tallies, and makes the minerals. He and I have been fishing together several times." Brand winked at his friend, and Bullen laughed.

"He had better not fish too often, bor. It's safer for him, if he's coming after our Daisy, not to have too much of that kind of sport."

"Oh, he's all right. Don't you worry yourself about him. He knows how to go about fishing without my help now. The only trouble we have is the major. He's wonderfully fond of fishing too, and sometimes he wants to take

our water. It isn't likely that the men wish to run up against their officers when they are amusing themselves."

"I am not saying that there is any real harm in it. I don't take a hand in it myself, as you know——"

"But you don't object to buying the fish we catch," quickly responded Brand.

"You and I, we are out of the coach, bor, so we can't fall off and hurt ourselves. But Barnes, he's different. If he doesn't mind his business and keep off sport, he may be broke; and when a man is broke, his wife's heart is often broke too."

"Pappa, the head-constable wants to speak to you," cried one of the children, who had been sitting on the steps of the verandah. The young Bullens never called Soobarow uncle. Bullen rose from his chair.

"Come in, Soobarow. I see you have Naga with you. Come in, both of you, and sit down."

They entered, Naga making his boots sound their loudest in what he fondly hoped was a thoroughly English fashion. He glanced round at Daisy to note the impression that they made upon her. It was not often that they paid the Bullen family a visit, as Soobarow never came except on business, and Naga's calls were discouraged by Bullen and his wife for reasons of their own. The entrance of the new-comers

filled the verandah to overflowing. Bullen glanced at his wife and said—

“It’s time some of these young ’uns were getting to bed, mor. Now then, come and say good night.”

Daisy led them round, and they solemnly tendered their plump soft hands to the company in turn, including their uncle and cousin. These two watched the ceremony with a mixture of curiosity and admiration that was not lost on the gratified parents, no such ceremonies being customary in the domestic circle of the head-constable. Lastly, the little people kissed their father.

“Molly, don’t you forget to hear them children their prayers,” he called after his wife, as she headed the procession towards the sleeping-room at the back of the house where a dim tumbler lamp flickered.

“All right, pappa,” she called from behind the screen that hid the bedroom door.

On the disappearance of the younger portion of the family with Mrs. and Miss Bullen, Brand rose and laid his half-finished pipe upon the balustrade of the verandah.

“Here, what are you doing, bor? Just you sit down again. Soobarow and I haven’t got any secrets that I know of,” said Bullen, hospitably, as he settled the new-comers in the chairs vacated by his wife and daughter.

Soobarow was a well-built native of broad proportions. He carried himself with a military bearing which his son imitated. The natural dignity of the father, however, was not so easily assumed by the son, whose manner was apt to border on arrogance, when he fancied that he was being most dignified. The elder man settled himself in the chair, and turned deferentially towards his host.

"I have come to ask your advice on a small matter, Mr. Bullen. When I went to the office to make my report, Mr. Carwardine inquired if I knew any English lady of the name of Tregethin."

There was a slight pause before Bullen answered. At length he asked, "What did you reply?"

"I told him that I knew no one of that name. Then he asked if any letter had come from England for Miss Tregethin addressed to my house."

Bullen kept silence, and Naga took the opportunity of adding his contribution to the story. "The master called at the post-office himself instead of sending me with the bag. He questioned the clerks about letters and the lady, but he could learn nothing."

"Nor do we know this lady," added Soobarow, looking from Bullen to Brand.

"Don't you worry your heads about her,

together. There ain't no such lady, you may depend," said Bullen.

"But see what came this evening," exclaimed Soobarow, as he produced Owen's letter to Dilys from the folds of a cotton handkerchief.

Bullen removed his pipe from his lips in blank astonishment whilst Brand eagerly leaned forward to read the inscription.

"'Miss Tregethin, care of Soobarow, Head Constable, Cuddalore. To be called for.' Did you call for it, Soobarow?"

"No; the post-peon lives near my house, and he brought it down to save me the trouble of fetching it."

Ben examined it closely, and then passed it on to Brand, who took it to the wall-lamp, turned it over, held it up to the light in an attempt to look through it, shaking his head all the time in wise perplexity.

"You had better keep that note lying handy somewhere, and if any one should call for it, you can let Mr. Carwardine know," advised Bullen at length.

"That was what I thought of doing, Mr. Bullen," replied Soobarow, quite satisfied with the decision.

"Have you sent that money to your brother at Pondicherry that he wrote for?"

"It went this morning."

"How did you send it? Not by money-order, I hope."

Soobarow laughed as he replied, "I know how to tread a mountain path without setting my foot upon a loose stone. The money went by the Lumbadees."

Daisy's brooch, which her father had been examining when they came in, was still lying on the arm of Bullen's chair. The attention of Naga had for some moments past been centred upon it. Now he ventured to take it in his hand.

"That's a pretty thing," remarked Bullen to Soobarow.

"Your daughter's?"

"Yes, given to her by Corporal Barnes of the camp."

The young police-peon moved restlessly in his chair as he listened to the conversation of his elders, and his boots creaked.

"Are you making a marriage between him and your daughter, Mr. Bullen?" asked Soobarow.

"Well, I can't exactly say," replied Bullen, with importance and condescension. "You see, we don't set about them sort of matters as you do. We leave it more to the young people. Me and my wife, we have to encourage them a bit. We ask Barnes to come here, and we let Daisy sit and talk to him whilst he takes a drink of something or other. And he generally brings a friend with him, just to show that at present there is nothing

particular. On Sunday evening he walks to church with Daisy and her mother and the young ones, and he will sit here and have a pipe with me after he has brought 'em back. Now he is beginning to give her presents, and that means that he'll speak before long, first to her to find out if he has taken her fancy, and then he'll come to me. That ain't your way of doing it, I know," concluded Ben with indulgent superiority.

"If we left it to our girls and boys, our marriages would not be satisfactory," remarked Soobarow, who had observed that Naga had been listening intently. He had no desire to raise rebellion in his son's breast against his own autocratic government of the home circle, and he was not altogether pleased when Naga ventured to give his opinion on the English method.

"Our married ones would perhaps quarrel less if they had the choosing of each other, and our women would be happier."

"You may be quite sure that they won't be happy if they have no voice in the matter. I hope my Daisy will marry where her heart goes. If she is satisfied, no doubt I shall be happy too."

At this point of the conversation Daisy entered the verandah, carrying a tray on which were some steaming hot cups of coffee. As she handed one to Naga, he gave her back the brooch.

"Do you like Mr. Barnes, Daisy?" he asked, in a low earnest voice.

"Oh no, not particularly," she answered, with a coy laugh which Naga mistook for indifference. If she had been a native and was hoping for marriage, she would have hung her head in tongue-tied modesty. It set his heart bounding with hope which was madness and folly.

"Will you marry him?"

"Oh, my! I don't know. What silly questions you ask, Naga," giggled Daisy.

"Have you any coffee for Brand, Daisy?" asked Bullen, before he helped himself to the last cup on the tray. "Where is he? He hasn't gone home, has he?"

"Mr. Brand has been helping me in the back verandah, pappa, just as if I were an English lady. He says he won't take any coffee; he will prefer a drop of hot grog. I wanted to put the kettle on to the charcoal when I took off the coffee; but he would not allow me. Mr. Brand is so polite." Daisy shot a glance at her cousin which made him wish once again that he had been born an Englishman.

"That's what I always say; he has such beautiful manners," commented Bullen, with warm approval.

A few minutes later Brand came back, bearing a small tin kettle in one hand, and a tray—on which was a lime and some sugar—in the other. He placed them on the flat top of the balustrade with a flourish worthy of an experienced club waiter.

Assisted by Daisy, the grog was mixed, whilst many gallant compliments were paid by the old soldier. Soobarow and his son looked on visibly impressed, and the younger mentally took a lesson in what he believed to be the correct manners in English society. When the coffee and grog were finished the company rose to depart.

“You must keep that letter, Soobarow, until some one asks for it. That’s my advice,” said Bullen, as he bade him good night. “Where is it?”

“Here,” said Brand, as he held it out to Soobarow; adding, with a wink at Bullen, “It’s my opinion that in this case there is no lady, though it isn’t often, Miss Bullen, that you can say that.”

CHAPTER VII

THE time flew by quickly and pleasantly for Owen. Oriental life was new to him, and he found it full of fascinations. Following the advice of his friend, he went the round of the station, paying calls which resulted in a shower of invitations to tennis and dinner-parties. Since he was the guest of her *fiancé*, Marion Hensley was especially gracious, and scarcely a day passed that he did not find himself at the Garden House, as Mr. Hensley's residence was called. Frequently, when Rex was detained by his work, he sent Owen off to make excuses for himself, and to amuse and be amused. His proxy proved sufficiently entertaining, and Marion uttered no reproaches when her busy lover appeared late in the day and apologetic.

The visitors were still staying at the Garden House, and Owen was soon on good terms with the two German entomologists. They were all more or less idle men whose time was their own, and they were thus thrown together. The story of the lost heiress interested them, and they

tendered much advice to the searcher, who submitted it all to Marion Hensley. They were particularly urgent that he should pay a visit to the mine and offered to accompany him there.

Rex was absorbed in his work. The trouble with the troops was not solved ; on the contrary, it increased day by day rather than lessened. As the Lumbadees had appeared in numbers with the arrival of the men in camp, he drew his own inference from the coincidence. Before the white tents sprang up on the maidan, Cuddalore was only visited now and then by the gipsies, and then they came by twos and threes. Now he heard of gangs of eighteen and twenty coming and going with frequency. He gave repeated orders to his subordinates concerning the necessity of watching them and their transport cattle ; but his men failed to lay their hands upon a single case of smuggling liquor into camp.

There is no one in the world so subject to occasional attacks of blindness as the police-peon of India. His natural instincts cause him to regard smuggling with lenient eyes. It is difficult to persuade him that it has anything to do with dishonesty. From the head-constable downwards, the carriage of contraband goods is placed in the category of such minor offences as drunkenness, trespassing, and carrying no light on the road after dark with a bullock-cart. Hence the anxiety of the police-officer to catch the gipsies himself,

and hence also his determination to prosecute the Lumbadee who had made the attack. His action had an unexpected result.

The morning following the arrest, a lame gipsy woman presented herself at the office and begged for an interview. As soon as she was admitted, she fell at the feet of the police-officer and implored his mercy. Gradually Rex gathered that she was the mother of the man who was in trouble. She was too old to work and too lame to follow the transport gangs. Her daughter lived with her, and her son supported her. If he was sent to prison, they would both starve. But she begged in vain. Rex was firm in his determination to punish the man, and it was not without some difficulty that he got rid of the suppliant. He was sorry for her, but he would not allow his pity to interfere with his duty.

Before he left the office he called Soobarow into his room and spoke to him about the necessity of taking decisive action with the Lumbadees. The head-constable listened deferentially.

"Why is your honour so anxious to convict?" he asked. "The Lumbadees will go as suddenly as they came, and for years we shall have no further trouble."

Rex glanced sharply in his face, but read nothing. His reply had a touch of impatience in it.

"You know the reason as well as I do,

Soobarow. The soldiers in camp are undoubtedly obtaining spirit through their assistance, and the men disgrace themselves by their excesses."

"If the gipsies carry the liquor across the boundary they should be stopped by the officers of the custom-house. It is impossible to catch them here."

"Why should it be so!" asked Rex.

"Because there are people more clever than the gipsies at the back of the business. The Lumbadees are but tools," was the reply.

"Can you find out how the liquor is carried into the camp?"

Soobarow remained silent a few seconds. "It might be possible to discover it. Your honour would prosecute the receivers, of course?"

"I should put the matter into the hands of the commanding officer, if I found that a soldier was implicated. It is against the rules to bring liquor into the camp, except that which goes to the canteen and the mess. A man caught breaking the rule is liable to heavy punishment."

"It is a difficult task that your honour has set us to do. The crow is a cunning bird, but it is ill adapted to trapping the kite. The British soldier has a keener vision than the kite, where strong drink is concerned. But with your honour's permission, I and my men will do our best to find out where the leakage is."

"It means reward and promotion, remember.

The youngest man in the force shall step over his seniors if he can put me on the right scent."

As he ceased speaking there was a sound of creaking boots outside the door, and Naga entered with a note for his master.

"Here, Naga, take the office-box back to the bungalow, and tell the butler to prepare some dinner for me," Rex said, as he placed his helmet upon his head. He sighed a little wearily. There was a couple of hours' work in those papers, which the peon was carrying home. It meant that he would be unable to accompany his guest to a friend's house where they were to have dined.

When Davenport started, Rex sent a message to say that he would look in after dinner to apologize for his enforced absence.

Nine o'clock struck, and the police-officer was ready to walk to his destination. The light of a young moon, which was dropping towards its setting, made a lantern unnecessary. The servants had gone to their suppers behind the bungalow, and he was alone. He heard the swish of drapery and a footfall upon the steps of the verandah.

"Who is there?" he asked in Tamil.

A figure draped in a blue Lumbadee cloth came out of the dim moonlight, and placed herself in an attitude of supplication before him.

Behind her stood a large, grey Lumbadee dog, which sniffed the air and watched the Englishman with observant eyes.

“Sir ! I come to ask mercy,” cried the woman, in the language of the country. Her voice was gentle and denoted youth. “I ask mercy for my brother. My mother is heart-broken. Never has her son been in trouble. Ah ! sir ! you do not know how good he has been to her, and how hard he has worked to keep her in comfort ! Be merciful and forgive.”

As she spoke, she raised herself into a kneeling posture and lifted her face to his. The light from the lamp fell full upon it, and he had an opportunity of studying the regular features. Her dark eyes looked appealingly into his. She clasped her hands together and pleaded the cause of her brother with still greater earnestness, whilst he stood silently regarding her. At length he said—

“I am sorry that I cannot grant your request. As I told your mother, I could not let your brother escape punishment. It is a serious offence to interfere with a servant of Government in the execution of his duty.”

“I know ! I know ! You speak but the truth, sir ! He was wrong, and deserves punishment. But, for my mother’s sake, be merciful.”

His eyes rested on the oval face ; he was conscious of feeling perturbed as she continued her entreaty. When she ceased he brushed aside the faint stirring of pity, and said—

“I cannot do it. I regret that your brother

has brought this trouble upon you and your mother. Cannot you earn for yourselves ? ”

“ She is entirely dependent upon him unless she becomes a beggar. Some time ago my mother had an accident ; she broke her leg, and ever since then she has been unable to travel with the tribe. She moves too slowly to keep up with the bullocks, and she is too old to carry loads like the younger women. So I have remained with her, travelling by easy stages when she has needed to take a journey. But more often we have lived quietly by ourselves, and our brother has seen that we have not wanted for rice. If we lose him now, how am I to support my mother ? ”

Rex turned away, and the girl rose to her feet, whilst the dog gave a low growl. She shook out the folds of her coarse, blue cloth, and rearranged the end, which was draped as a hood over her hair. Moving slightly, so that she again faced him, her eyes sought his for a more favourable reply. But it was in vain that she looked for a relenting on his part.

“ Justice must take its course,” he said shortly.

“ You can stop the proceedings if you choose,” she replied quickly.

“ I have no wish to do so,” he answered.

“ Why are you so severe ? ” she asked. Her modulated tone of entreaty again struck a note

of pity in his breast which made it hard to maintain his severity of tone. He replied with more gentleness than he had hitherto shown.

"Because he is one of your caste. Your tribesmen give trouble. They carry wine and spirits from French territory without paying the tax, and the Government is cheated of its revenues."

"It is the owners of the liquor who cheat. What does the poor Lumbadee know about revenue? Does he not faithfully pay the tax upon his bullock? And having paid the cess, he carries goods without asking questions." She spoke with a renewed hope.

"Indeed, you make a mistake. You must be aware, since you belong to the tribe, that the gipsies know quite well what they are about when they carry contraband goods in from Pondicherry. They take the risk with their eyes open, and their employers pay them accordingly."

"My brother was not caught carrying anything contraband."

"No; but he assaulted me as I was endeavouring to discover whether the law had been evaded or not. I still have a suspicion that there was something wrong about the loads on the bullocks, otherwise why should he have attacked me?"

"Sir, a dog flies at a man when he is startled."

"Therefore a dog must be chained," he rejoined.

"Not unless he is dangerous. The Lumbadees are not evil-doers. They are kind-hearted and faithful to those who understand them."

A flicker of a smile hovered round her full lips as she uttered these words.

"My good girl," exclaimed Rex, with a sudden change of manner, "it is of no use telling untruths to one possessing my knowledge!"

He moved towards a small table whereon his hat and stick lay. Did his ears deceive him, or was that slight sound a low laugh? He turned upon her sharply. She was bending over the dog, and her hand was laid upon its head. There was not the ghost of a smile about her lips. On the contrary, the curves had a downward trend, and there was a suspicion of tears in her eyes as she looked up and said—

"Will you not be the friend of the Lumbadees rather than their enemy?"

Her pleading stirred him. He took refuge in harshness.

"Go!" he said sternly. "I will listen no longer. The law will have to take its course."

She spoke a few words in Lumbadee to the dog, which had growled angrily as Rex altered his tone. Then she turned to the police-officer.

"You are hard and ungenerous. You do not

deserve the name of Englishman," she cried, with a sudden burst of passion.

"At any rate, I am just," he answered, astonished at her flow of words and assurance.

"Justice and mercy should go together. You are without mercy."

"As you please ; only go, and go at once. You force me to lose my time and my temper."

He placed his hat upon his head and took up his walking-stick ; then he waited for her to move. The night was fresh, with a pleasant wind blowing in from the sea. The dark leaves of the banyan trees glistened in the silver moonlight. She let her eyes rest on his once more with a steady gaze, which puzzled him. Was it mockery or entreaty that lurked in their depths ? Abruptly she departed, and seemed to glide rather than walk down the steps of the verandah into the subdued light of the moon ; the dog preceding her.

Rex followed with the intention of seeing her off the premises. Taking the path by the carriage-drive, she passed through the garden gate, and bent her steps towards the road. But before reaching the exit of the fort, she bore to the right, under the glacis, where the earthworks had once ended in a facing of bricks and mortar, which formed a wall. Here were the entrances to the casemates and powder-chambers, which had remained intact, the hard laterite masonry having

resisted the ravages of the climate as well as the destroying hand of the building thief. Keeping along the wall within the fortifications, she picked her way amongst the prickly pear and broken *débris*, as if the ground was not unfamiliar. The path she was pursuing encircled the inner fort, and led back to the bungalow.

The police-officer hesitated. Marion Hensley was dining at the house where he was expected, and it was already late, his interview with the girl having detained him. Curiosity, however, proved stronger than love for the moment, and he followed the gipsy girl. She seemed to have no suspicion that she was being watched. He quickened his pace, intending to warn her that she must not loiter within the boundaries of the fort. She was not more than fifteen yards away when he struck his foot against a small piece of masonry. The sound caught her ear, and she turned. One moment he saw her in the moonlight, as she glanced back with the alertness of a startled animal. In the next she had vanished, and as he bounded forward to the spot where she disappeared, he fancied that he heard a laugh, low and musical, but mocking.

He searched right and left, going on towards his bungalow, and retracing his steps several times; more than once he uttered the call used by natives to summon each other. Then he returned to the place where he had seen her last,

but there was not a sign of a human being nor of the animal. Here and there along the earthworks, was an occasional entrance to the subterranean ways. She might easily have taken shelter in one of these, but any attempt to follow her would be useless. The passages were enveloped in inky darkness, and he knew them to be the haunt of snakes and centipedes. He scarcely believed that she would dare to enter one without some sort of light. But in case she had taken this course to escape, he thought that it might be advisable to mark the spot where she disappeared, and examine it the next morning. It was just possible that the Lumbadees were using one of the tunnels for the storage of contraband stuff.

"There, my lady," he said, as he scratched up the ground with his stick. "If that scoundrel of a brother of yours has had the impudence to make his storeroom under the very nose of the police-officer, I shall find it to-morrow, without doubt."

As he stooped in the moonlight to see that his stick had effected some sort of mark in the loose sand of the pathway, he heard her laughter again. Glancing up, he caught her figure silhouetted against the sky, as she strode lightly over the top of the ramparts in the direction of the old gateway, with the dog trotting close at her heels. Once the animal stopped and looked back, as though only waiting a word of command to return

and attack him. But a low whistle brought it to her heels, and they passed out of sight.

"That's odd," he said, rising to his feet. "How on earth did she get up there? She must have braved the snakes and have hidden in one of the old casemates. Well, so long as she leaves the fort, I don't care where she goes. All I want is to prevent her from loafing round my bungalow."

The next morning the police-officer awoke early. More than once in the night, his dreams had shown him the Lumbadee girl, who gazed at him now in entreaty, now in derision. It was of her that he first thought when he unclosed his eyes at the rising of the sun.

As soon as he had finished his early-morning tea, he hurried round to the east side of the fort, taking as nearly as possible the pathway traversed the evening before. At the point where his strange visitor had turned off the road, leading out of the fort, he stood for a few seconds, calculating distances. Unless he was much mistaken, she hid herself from his view about fifty yards from where he was. He counted his steps as he proceeded slowly along, scrutinizing the ground. When he had gone thirty yards he stopped abruptly. There, in the pathway, were his marks as fresh as when he made them with the iron ferrule of his walking-stick. The initials "R.C.," which looked so indistinct in the moonlight, stood

out as clearly as need be. He observed that there was an entrance to a casemate almost opposite to the sign in the sand.

"Yet I should have said that the distance was greater. It shows how one may be deceived in the dark," he mused, as he studied the rude Roman capitals of his initials, the casemate opposite, and the distances between himself and the two ends of the path. He walked to the extreme end of the track, noting its details right and left. Then he retraced his steps and looked round again. Yes, this must have been the spot. This was the only casemate that had an unimpeded entrance. All the others were more or less grown up with the repellant prickly pear, or blocked with fallen masses of broken masonry.

He entered the tunnel. Its roof, which was barely six feet high, was arched with brickwork in such a manner as to make it bomb-proof. The atmosphere inside was hot and stifling, and his nose detected the recent presence of goats and bats. It was evident that the herdsmen, who frequented the ramparts, made use of it in wet weather as a shelter for themselves and their animals.

Rex took a small lamp from his pocket and lighted it. He kept a wary eye open for reptiles and noisome insects, but to his surprise he saw neither one nor the other. The tunnel turned to the left, and terminated in a wall of dusty earth,

through which not even a rat could have passed. Having examined the subterranean way thoroughly, he regained the open air, thankful to inhale the fresh sea-breeze into his lungs once more.

So far he was satisfied that he had found the means whereby the girl had effected her disappearance ; but, at the same time, he was distinctly vexed with himself. His powers of observation at night had proved defective, and had misled him. He could have sworn that he had lost his quarry some twenty or thirty yards further on towards the south-east corner of the glaci^s ; and that it was upon the mound above that particular spot that he had seen her figure against the sky.

He went over the ground again, and the further investigation only confirmed the tale told by the walking-stick. It seemed impossible for any human being to have been hidden at the spot where he imagined the girl vanished, for the cactus grew thickest just at that point, and formed a barrier to the only casemate into which she could possibly have crept.

CHAPTER VIII

THE letter-bag containing the inland morning mail was handed to Rex as he reached the verandah. He opened it, and found one for his friend. He carried it to the garden, where Owen Davenport was revelling in the sweet scents and shady arcades which accorded with his thoughts. The boom of the sea, as it tumbled into surf, sounded pleasantly on his ears. He stood where the tuberoses lilies clustered thickest. Over trusses of oleander blossom his eye sought the blue line of the sea, but his thoughts were not with the restless ocean. Yet it was of the sea that he spoke when he had greeted his host.

“Why should we not have some sea bathing?” he asked.

“You would not find it worth the trouble of toiling down in the sun to the water and back across that dreary stretch of sand. Moreover, there are sharks to be reckoned with on this coast.”

“The seaside, then, is one more of the glammers of India—one of the elusive delights,

which seem within your grasp, but are unattainable."

"Like your heiress, for instance," said Rex, with a laugh. "Talking of her, here is a letter that looks as if it came from that lady herself. The post-mark is Bangalore."

Owen opened the letter with some curiosity. "You are right; it is from Dilys Tregethin herself. She says that she has received my brother's letter, and my own. How astounding!"

"It's odd, because Soobarow assures me that no one has called for letters at his house; and that the one he received—yours, of course—is still lying there unclaimed."

"She is much distressed to hear of her aunt's illness," continued Owen. "At present she is at Bangalore, to which place she is tied by certain duties. But she does not say what they are."

"She has married, you may be sure," exclaimed Rex. "Your chance of securing the heiress for yourself is gone."

The words roused a chain of thought in Owen's mind, and he became silent. His companion broke into his brown study by asking what else Miss Tregethin had to say for herself.

"She wants money, and would like to know if I can advance her some whilst she directs her solicitor to forward a remittance from England."

"That's all right. Now you will be able to put your hand upon her. I am always delighted

when a fellow, who is 'wanted,' wants something himself. It is like the water-hole to the sportsman when he is after big game."

"Apparently there will be no difficulty. Her letter is quite simple and straightforward. She gives me an address at Bangalore, to which I am to write. She also asks if I am coming to Bangalore. If so, she hopes I will call upon her."

"Then the mystery is at an end, and I am no longer interested. You will ask for an interview, of course. You can't very well propose to a lady whom you have never seen," said Rex, more in fun than in earnest.

His words did not provoke an answering laugh; the chaff missed fire, something else occupying his hearer's mind.

"To be honest, I shall show the letter to Miss Hensley, with your kind permission, and ask her advice."

He let his eyes rest a moment upon his friend's face with an odd expression of uneasiness, but turned them away abruptly as the ready reply was given.

"Ah, do! Marion has such a good head for business, and she is the best-hearted girl in the world."

"You are a lucky fellow," said Owen, as he put an end to the conversation by strolling away towards the bank of the river.

It was only eight o'clock, and Rex retraced his steps to the bungalow. He could not afford to be idle at that time in the morning ; and he was soon deep in voluminous reports sent in from the district. The heiress, Owen, even Miss Hensley, were forgotten in his endeavours to extricate the true from the false, and to follow threads that were not will-o'-the-wisps, in different cases of crime. Only those who have had experience amongst the natives of India can conceive the tortuous methods by which justice is sometimes arrived at, and how easy it is for the wrong man to be brought to punishment. In the very first year of Carwardine's service, a case occurred which proved a surprising eye-opener.

A robbery was committed, and the crime was brought home in the clearest manner possible to a one-eyed old man, who happened to be known to Rex. The man had a peculiar walk, due to partial paralysis. The robbery, which was accompanied by violence, took place at eleven o'clock at night forty miles distant from where Rex was camping. As the police-officer rode into camp at nine o'clock that very night, he saw the one-eyed man carrying a load of firewood upon his back towards the village near the camp. Not only did Rex notice the dragging of one leg peculiar to his walk, but, as he passed, the old man looked up in the light of a moon that was nearly full, and made a salaam to the police-

officer. Notwithstanding this fact, the evidence against the villager was as conclusive as it could possibly be.

Rex voluntarily appeared to witness in his favour; and he urged the impossibility of a man of his age and infirmity being able to cover forty miles in two hours, and to commit a robbery single-handed with violence at the end of it. It was of little use. A portion of the stolen property had been found in the old man's house, and no less than three witnesses swore to having seen him lurking about the house where the robbery was committed. His own people testified to his absence all night, and declared on their oaths that he was not home till daylight. So he was sentenced to four years' imprisonment, and the sentence was received with a blinking of the eyes and a little grunt of resignation.

When Rex expressed his surprise to the old man's son—a stalwart, devil-may-care young man full of good-humoured impudence, who stepped into his father's shoes and ruled the house with a rod of iron—he replied with a laugh—

“Sir, my father is a wonderful man, wise and far-seeing. But he is old and of little use in supporting the family, which is large. Is it not better that he should serve in prison, where he will be well cared for, in place of a younger man who can work, and to whom the women and children might look for support?”

"It is not right that the innocent should suffer for the guilty," Rex replied.

The young man looked fearlessly into the police-officer's eyes with an ingenuous smile, as he made answer.

"When a man has passed the age of fifty, can he call himself innocent of all evil in this country? Surely by that time he is deserving of some punishment."

"If he is an evil-doer, of course he should be punished," said Rex, somewhat puzzled.

"But not when he is young. If fate decrees that he is to bear punishment at all, let it be when he is old; then no one but himself will suffer. If it falls when he is young, who can say how many others may suffer with him? My father said himself that he was only fit for old woman's work—to gather firewood. It is a gain to a large household like ours, living on a small plot of land, when the old and infirm are removed from the family."

"Because he is old and infirm, he could never have committed that robbery," replied Rex.

The other laughed again and made a salaam. "The gods and the Sircar have decreed it. They are satisfied, so let it be."

Rex moved for a fresh trial, but his endeavour to obtain the release of the old villager by proving an alibi was frustrated by the confession of the crime by the prisoner, who averred

that a friend had personated himself and deceived the police-officer.

Rex was deeply engaged with the details of a disappearance case which was giving him some trouble. His subordinates, in the district where it occurred, were too anxious to bring a charge of murder on the strength of it against a man who had incurred the anger of the Zemindar. Rex had a strong suspicion that the arm of the law was being used in this case as a weapon for private revenge, and he was determined to frustrate any such design. "I shall have to go over and look into matters personally," he said, as he put the papers together again. There was the sound of a voice outside. "Is that Soobarow?" he called to his servants. "Tell him to come in."

As he entered the head-constable said, "The gentlemen at the Garden House have left for Bangalore. They took the ten-o'clock train last night."

"Have you discovered if they had any other object in visiting the place except the collection of insects?"

Soobarow did not reply directly to the question, but continued his report.

"Five nights they went out and caught poochees of all sorts."

"Where did they go?"

"Sometimes near the river, sometimes they came round the fort. They were also upon that

part where there are pools of water ; and, sir, they were several times near the camp, between the camp and the sea, among the sandhills."

The head-constable looked at his chief to see if his words had roused any train of thought, but Rex gave no sign as he put another query.

"Did they take measurements, or write anything down on paper ?"

"No, sir. They were not like the last gentlemen who stayed with the judge. These took no notice of the buildings, nor of the old fortifications. I told your honour that they had been at Pondicherry. They left behind them three empty wooden cases, such as are used by the French merchants for packing spirits. Their servant told us that the spirits were used for holding the dead poochees. But who can say if it was so ?"

The import of his subordinate's words was not lost upon the police-officer this time.

"Did they take away any similar cases ?"

"There were four more with their luggage ; and no less than six were sent on by goods train two days ago," replied Soobarow, who was not aware that the police-officer had made his own inquiries, and had been satisfied by the sight of certain invoices.

"You have taken the men off duty at the Garden House, of course ? By-the-by, did the gentlemen speak to any of the men in camp ?"

Soobarow answered in the negative, and Rex proceeded to other matters. As the head-constable was about to leave the room, Carwardine asked casually if the letter for Miss Tregethin had been claimed.

"No, sir ; it still lies at my house."

"Where do you keep it ?"

"My wife has it locked up with her jewels."

The Garden House at Cuddalore is usually occupied by the Government official, known throughout the Presidency as the Collector. In other parts of the British Empire in the East he is given the more appropriate title of Commissioner or Government Agent.

Like the fort, the Garden House has a history of its own, and it figures in the story of our wars in South India. It was built by Thomas Pitt, the grandfather of the great politician. The dining-room has an arched or bomb-proof roof with massive supports, which give it the appearance of a cloistered chamber. Of course, the room has its ghost—the spirit of a Frenchman who was murdered there ; but the apparition has not manifested itself for many years past, and has therefore nothing to do with this story.

A fine drawing-room has been erected in more recent years over the dining-room. The broad pillared verandahs temper the glare of the day, and hold the rays of the fierce Indian sun at a respectful distance. The sea-breeze rustling

through the trees brings the scent of sweet blossom upon its cooling wings.

In Marion's opinion it was the pleasantest room in the house, whether she sat at her work during the sunny hours of the day or gathered her father's guests around her in the evening. Owen had learnt to know the room well. To him it was the setting of one of the prettiest pictures he had ever seen. The opinion which he formed at first sight, as she leaned forward in the victoria to greet his companion, had not been altered. In addition he had discovered in her a most entertaining companion. The circumstances of her life obliged her to take a prominent position in the society of the station, such as her mother would have filled had she been living; and this made her an excellent hostess. Yet with all her duties she was full of spirits and possessed a keen sense of humour with a ready tongue. Women declared her to be excellent company, whilst men found her as good to look at as to listen to.

It was noon, the hour in India when every English lady is prepared, if she is a lover of society, to receive callers. Marion had a ready welcome for any one who did her the honour of paying her a visit. Nor did she keep them waiting, but was there to greet the visitors as they entered the room.

The large drawing-rooms of India have no "cosy corners," but, instead, there is usually

a spot where the air blows its coolest, and the light is shaded to that point which is most acceptable to the eye. Here the lady of the house, if she has any love for the drawing-room, makes a bower for herself. Here are gathered the choicest ferns and palms from the garden, the easiest chairs, the softest couch. The floor is strewn with cashmere rugs, and on the table lie the latest papers and magazines. The silken cushions on couch and chairs invite luxurious reading and idle thought. Such a nook had Marion made for herself in the drawing-room of the old Garden House.

She crossed the big room and stood upon the threshold of one of the wide French windows that opened with double doors upon the verandah. A little sigh of relief escaped her lips as she glanced round and realized that she was once more alone. Then her eyes rested upon the green foliage of the trees that fringed the carriage-drive. A golden oriole and a blue roller bird tumbled in and out of the shining leaves, whilst hidden within the depths of the branches, the mynas chattered with jovial gaiety. She watched for a sight of the neat little talkers, but their grey and black plumage was nothing to be proud of ; so they left the yellow oriole and the blue jay to parade in the sun, and remained hidden within the leafy shade.

Marion turned from the window and seated

herself at her writing-table, which was drawn within the bounds of her nook. She wrote the heading and date upon a sheet of notepaper. Then she paused, and her eyes wandered back to the green trees, and followed the flight of a black and red butterfly, which hovered over the blossom of the neem trees. But her thoughts were not with the ambitious insect as it rashly penetrated the domain of the roller bird ; nor did she miss the patch of black, dotted with scarlet, when it presently fell a victim to the azure beauty's hunger. Her ears were alert for the sound of wheels and the long smooth trot of the country-bred mare that drew Carwardine's cart. Suddenly she sprang up.

"What a fool I am ! My thoughts are getting out of hand. I want some exercise. Ayah," she called from the doorway, "bring me the skipping-rope."

The ayah, an elderly woman much bejewelled, came at her bidding, carrying a skipping-rope of red silk.

"Time for callers, missie," she said, with strong disapproval.

"Never mind the callers ; give me the rope."

She seized the polished wooden handles, and drew the rope from the unwilling hands that held it. Throwing it over her head, she prepared to use it with the zest of a schoolgirl.

"Not nice, missie," remonstrated the ayah,

“Collectors’ ladies and judges’ ladies never jumping like that. It is half-caste schoolgirl’s trick only.”

But all the answer she had was a laugh, and “Get out of the way, old lady! One! two! three! four!”

Whilst the ayah looked on with disapprobation written on every feature, Marion danced through the circling rope with the graceful movements of a *pas-seul* performer. “The policeman very angry to see missie doing jumpkana business.” Her murmurings were of no avail, and she was obliged to be an unappreciative spectator of an exhibition which would have charmed another beholder. The ayah’s desire to see her mistress married was not altogether disinterested. The time would come when the collector, who now paid her wages, would retire. If missie married, she need not trouble about another situation, as she would naturally pass into her service. It caused the good woman real anxiety when she saw her mistress risking the chance of marriage by these wild vagaries.

There was a sound of wheels, and the ayah advanced towards Marion.

“Give play-rope, missie; please give me the play-rope,” she cried, holding out her hand. “Mr. Carwardine is coming.”

But Marion, with heightened colour and eyes full of mischief, eluded her grasp and backed

towards the door opening upon the landing at the top of the stairs. Babajee was ascending to announce the arrival of Mr. Davenport, who was following close behind. The ayah and peon exchanged a solemn glance. Possibly there was another danger ahead besides the missie's love of exercise.

"Here you are, ayah," she cried, tossing the rope to the woman. "Babajee, bring me a glass of lemonade."

As the two servants departed she turned to Owen.

"The old lady has been much scandalized by my sudden desire for exercise. I sat down to write a letter, but no sooner did I take up my pen than I had a fit of the fidgets. So I called for my skipping-rope."

"A first-rate institution, and I hope the fidgets—which I believe are a complaint peculiar to your sex—have been reduced to order," said Owen, as he sank into a chair near her writing-table. It was a chair which he had appropriated to himself whenever he paid her a visit, and by his cool, deliberate appropriation, had made it his in her eyes. As Marion reseated herself at the writing-table, he settled himself back amongst the soft cushions to revel in the luxury of the hour.

"So your moth-catching friends are gone," he remarked, letting his gaze rest upon her as one of the luxuries to be enjoyed.

“Yes ; it was a pleasant variety having guests who were absorbed in a pursuit for which the busy Anglo-Indian has no time. They were the most enthusiastic collectors I ever met.”

“You think that they had no other object in view except butterflies, moths, beetles, and stamps ?”

She laughed as she declared her belief in their good faith. Then she took up her pen.

“I must finish this letter before you make me idle. It is such a novel sensation to have a thoroughly idle person of your sex as a companion. People in this country are usually working with the traces never relaxed.”

“Idle you call me ? I assure you that I hate all idleness——” he was protesting, when she stopped him.

“Here is a new magazine ; read it diligently whilst I write, and save yourself from the charge.”

She dipped her pen in the ink, and resolutely turned her eyes from the smiling gaze with which he regarded her. As she bent over the paper, he opened his book and dutifully buried himself in its pages. But though he turned the leaves, it was very little that he read. Even the illustrations failed to hold his attention.

Marion had apparently set herself an uncongenial task. More than once the pen ceased, and she sank into deep contemplation. Owen’s sharp ear caught the faint breath of a sigh as she

resumed her writing. He longed to ask her what the difficulty was, and why she was troubled. But he felt that he had no right to penetrate beyond the bounds of the new friendship. Confidences were not for him; they belonged to another person. His eye wandered frequently over the pages of the magazine to the writing-table. She was good to look at, he said to himself. Though he might not be admitted to her confidence, there was no reason why he should not fill his eyes with the pleasant vision.

At last the writing came to an end. Owen summoned Babajee for her, and the missive was despatched to the post. The magazine was thrown aside, and they settled down to leisurely chat. This was by no means their first *tête-à-tête*; but to-day it seemed to both that the hour possessed a new charm. Owen knew that it was due to the absence of the naturalists. Though they were not always present in the room when he called, they were in the house, and might at any moment enter to claim the attention of their hostess. To-day he had Marion all to himself, and he revelled in the knowledge with guilty delight.

Their conversation as a rule did not contain a word worth recording, but it had the glamour of youthful fun, and it was served with the sauce of light laughter. Rex or any other man might have joined in it; but the hard-worked Indian

official has no time to waste in desultory chat during daylight, and when his labour is over, he is too tired to talk much, or to listen. This was frequently the case with the police-officer, who sat too willingly silent, whilst his friend entertained him and the girl of his choice with the efflorescence of an active and unfatigued brain.

"I have come to show you a letter, Miss Hensley, and to ask your advice," said Owen, as Marion turned in the dainty revolving chair and faced him.

"I shall be delighted to help you in any way that I can. Who has been writing to you?"

These two young people were most punctilious on a certain point. Owen called at the Garden House at least once a day, frequently twice. He came alone more often than not, and on each occasion he thought it necessary to offer an excuse for his visit, an excuse that Marion found equally necessary to accept.

"The letter is from Miss Tregethin."

Marion bent forward with eagerness as she exclaimed in a startled voice—

"The heiress?"

"Yes; she is found—has discovered herself, I should say."

"Where is she?"

"At Bangalore."

There was a pause, during which her thoughts wandered.

"I wonder if I shall see her there. I am going to Bangalore in a day or two."

He looked at her in surprise, but she avoided his eye.

"You! Why are you running away?"

She turned upon him with a suspicion of defiance in her manner as she exclaimed—

"Running away! What do you mean?" Then, as he did not reply, she continued, "I have accepted an invitation of long standing. I thought it best to seize the opportunity of doing so as soon as my guests left."

"Does Carwardine know that you are off so soon?" he asked, unable to control his curiosity. If Marion departed, Cuddalore would be dull beyond endurance.

"I shall tell him this evening when I see him at the club. I—I have only lately decided on going."

Her eyes dropped before his searching gaze.

"Are you obliged to go?"

"Yes—no—that is, I thought it best——"

She rose hurriedly to meet Babajee, who appeared at the door with a sparkling tumbler of lemonade, in which a block of ice floated.

"Ice only now coming," he said, by way of explaining the delay in the execution of the order.

Owen watched her in silence as she moved back to the vicinity of his chair. She seated

herself upon the couch, and leaned back upon the pile of cushions at its head.

"You were going to show me a letter," she remarked, as she sipped the cool drink.

"So I was. I had forgotten all about it for the moment."

She gave him her half-emptied glass and took the letter, read it in silence, and returned it.

"Apparently my task is done since the heiress is found," observed Owen.

"It is half done," Marion corrected. "You have still to fulfill your promise of taking her back to Mrs. Myrtle."

She played with the bead jewels upon her gold chain, drawing them restlessly through her fingers, and her eyes studiously avoided his.

"I don't think that I shall have any difficulty in doing that. I shall represent the very precarious state of her aunt's health, and if she has any heart at all, she will consent to go to England, at least for a time.

"You note that she speaks of ties?"

"Yes, and Rex thinks that she may be married," he rejoined quickly.

"If so, you will be released from your promise to Mrs. Myrtle."

He laughed awkwardly as he replied—

"That promise was made more in joke than in earnest."

"Mrs. Myrtle did not accept it in joke.

She, you told me, took it seriously, and she looks to you for the fulfilment of it."

He moved restlessly, glancing at her with questioning eyes, as though he would fathom her motive for pressing the point.

"When I made that promise I spoke flip-pantly and I thought lightly. I have come to the conclusion that marriage is a serious matter ; it may open the door to an Elysium or it may send one headlong to Avernus."

"And how long is it since you came to that conclusion?" she asked impetuously, without waiting to consider her words. The reply was swift and its import full of meaning.

"Since I have known you, Marion."

There was an exchange of glances which completed a tale that could never now be untold. Silence fell on them both, and the girl, with head averted, watched the mynas as they darted out of their leafy hiding-places for a moment, tempted by an escaping insect. The man devoured her with his eyes, not daring to speak again lest he should only plunge them both deeper in the abyss that had opened suddenly at their feet. His self-control returned, and he rose with a quick decisive movement to his feet.

"I believe I had better be going home to lunch," he said, a little unsteadily.

But Marion still watched the mynas. It was not until he had almost reached the door

that she sprang up, as though roused from a dream.

“Mr. Davenport!”

He turned to face her. She was standing with the palms behind her, a picture of glorious life and health. One hand rested upon the writing-table, the other hung by her side, hidden amongst the white folds of her frock, that he might not see the clenched fingers.

“You have asked for my advice, but you have not waited to hear what I have to say.” She spoke with feverish earnestness. “Your way seems clear to me. Miss Tregethin must be told of her aunt’s danger, of which she is apparently not aware, and every means must be taken to persuade her to go to England—by the next mail, if possible—with you as an escort.”

“What if she is married?” he asked, regaining his equanimity.

“She is not married. Had she possessed a husband, he would have manifested himself as her protector. No, the ties she speaks of are those which kept her in the country when her aunt would have taken her home. You have pledged yourself to break those ties by some means—marriage as a last resource, if it is acceptable to her, and you must hold your pledge to the dying woman sacred.”

He retraced his steps across the Persian carpet that covered the floor in the centre of the room.

"I will use every argument in my power to induce her to go to Mrs. Myrtle, but——"

He checked himself, knowing that he could not control his speech as easily as he could control his actions.

"Yes!" she said, with unnecessary vehemence. "You must keep your word; and if all other methods fail, you are bound to take her home as your wife—if you can win her;" and turning abruptly, she went out on to the balcony, where trails of morning-glory hid her from his sight.

"God forbid!" he muttered to himself in a dreary voice, as he slowly descended the broad staircase.

As he drove along the straight carriage-drive, he looked back at the ipomea, with its burden of blue blossom wreathing the verandah, but the white-silk drapery was gone. Could his sight have penetrated the depths of the shaded drawing-room, he would have seen a girl lying upon the couch, with her face hidden amongst the silken cushions, grappling with the first anguish of her life.

CHAPTER IX

DAISY BULLEN was in the verandah of her father's house. On the floor sat a dirzee, his back against the wall, a large sheet spread in front of him, and laid out with patterns, materials, pins, scissors, and a six-months' old fashion-book that smelt strongly of smoke. The tailor was putting his whole soul into the creation of a ball-dress, and Daisy was superintending. It was her first ball-dress, and it was to be a diaphanous dream of white grenadine and pink roses.

The sergeants and corporals of the camp had decided to give a dance. When Corporal Barnes brought the two tickets, he explained that he had only those at his disposal. He expressed a warm hope that Mr. and Miss Bullen would accept the invitation. Mrs. Bullen was quite content to be omitted. Loyal as she was to her husband's nation, she would have hesitated to appear at a sergeants' ball under any circumstances. If the occasion demanded the adoption of evening dress, her hesitation would have merged into a firm refusal.

But though she was not going herself, she took

the keenest pride in her daughter's dress. Bullen had told her that no reasonable expense was to be spared, as probably Mr. Barnes would have something to say to Daisy that evening. "Just let the girl look her very best, Molly mor. When my sister was married, I remember my mother made everything in the house, and lor! you couldn't have told but what the dress came from the best shop in Beccles."

Mrs. Bullen had had the standard of the unknown mother-in-law held before her eyes all her married life. She never dared to hope that she could emulate her husband's mother. But she never ceased from endeavouring to imitate all the virtues that Bullen declared graced his parent. She did her best with the patient humility of the Oriental woman, and was supremely happy when her husband told her that his own mother could not have done better. She spent the whole of one day in the bazaar, bargaining with the native hawker over the material, and the half of another in the purchase of the pink roses. Then came the hiring of the tailor, who wanted to make it a contract job, carried out at his own house. This proposal brought forth a voluble outpouring on the part of Mrs. Bullen concerning the folly of all such arrangements where cutting-out had to be done and material might be stolen. In the end, the tailor was engaged to come by the day and work under the eye of Miss Bullen.

Whenever her daughter appeared in the kitchen or back verandah to offer her customary help in the house work, Mrs. Bullen sent her back to the dirzee with—

“Now, Daisy girl, you just leave that for the tanniketch to do. You go and look after that man. Oh my! if you don’t watch him every minute of the day, he will be cutting your dress all wrong and stealing half the stuff.”

So Daisy, nothing loth, was living in the front verandah, now on a chair facing the tailor, now on her knees helping him to pin crumpled, much-worn patterns to unmanageable grenadine. The dirzee, far from being annoyed by the supervision, was full of happy importance at being the centre of her attention, and was endeavouring to break his record in the matter of “barl-dress, only.”

“Shall I put a yem on the beyind? or shall I put farlse peese only?” he inquired, as he held up the train of the unfinished skirt for Daisy’s inspection.

As she was concentrating her mind on the important point, and hesitating between the mysterious “yem” and “farlse peese,” her small brother Jimmy came into the verandah. The interest in Daisy’s dress was not confined to herself and her parents. It spread through the whole household, extending to the two servants, the kitchen woman and the scullion, a merry lanky scamp, whose ambition was to be cook in the

judge's house. Even the appa woman, who brought the rice cakes every morning, once ventured under the wing of the tanniketch to peep at the dirzee from behind the door with exclamations of wonder and admiration. The children paid many visits, having more time at their disposal than those members of the establishment who were engaged in the various duties which had to be performed in the cook-room and its vicinity. Jimmy, under pretence of requiring assistance in the buckling of his school satchel, ventured to the very border of the sheet.

"Now, look where you are going, Jimmee boy!" exclaimed Daisy, as she glanced apprehensively at his dusty shoes.

"Oh! that is pretty! Daisy, you will look like a fairy-queen. And mamma says there will be a beautiful supper. My! I should like to go! You will bring me something in your parket, won't you?" he concluded, in a wheedling tone.

"Hark at you, Jimmee boy! Why do you say parket like a native? Say porket; that's how Mr. Barnes speaks. Oh my! there's the clock striking. You are late for afternoon school, and the schoolmaster will beat you. Run, Jimmy boy! run!" she cried, as she fastened the strap and ridded herself of the interruption. Falling on her knees to obtain closer vision, she once more centred her thoughts on the "yem" question. Before she could come to a decision, her mind

was once more diverted. This time it was the distant creaking of boots.

"Oh my ! there is that tiresome Naga ! " she cried, with puckered brow, as the creaking marked the passage of the owner of the boots up the verandah steps. She made no movement to greet the visitor, but busied herself with the momentous "yem." "How much have you to turn in, tailor ? That is not enough for a hem. What a stupid fellow you are ! You don't know how to make a ball-dress."

The dirzee tossed aside the grenadine with an impatient gesture, and produced a roll of dirty notes from an inner pocket.

"Yes, missie, I make plenty barl-dresses for judge's lady, collector's lady, captain's lady. Missie see chits. Those ladies never having yem ; they liking farlse peese. Then only eeskirt nicely lying on ground."

"Daisy ! Daisy !" softly called Naga from the sunny side of the bamboo blind.

"Come in, Naga," cried the distracted Daisy. "I am very busy, but you may come in if you like and see what the tailor is doing ;" for she thought that he could have no other purpose for his visit except to see her dress. "Yes, tailor, perhaps you are right ; you may put on a false piece," she said in a conciliatory tone, remembering that the race of dirzees is apt to take offence and show displeasure by walking off and

boycotting the house where an insult has been offered.

The indignant tailor was mollified, and replacing the grimy roll of "chits," took up his work again. He put a remnant of the material into her hand, remarking in milder accents—

"Plenty eestuff got."

"Daisy ! Daisy !" called Naga again.

"Oh my ! how troublesome you are ;" ejaculated Miss Bullen, as she dropped the white grenadine which she had been holding in her hands. "Why cannot you push the blind aside and walk in, Naga ?" she asked, raising her voice.

"I cannot ; my hands are full," was the reply.

She rose to her feet and went to the entrance. As she drew aside the blind she disclosed the young policeman dressed in a smart new uniform and turban. In one hand he held a large bouquet, and in the other a cake of the same generous proportions.

"Oh my ! now, what have you got there ?" cried the girl, the ball-dress forgotten in the surprise of the moment.

A broad sheepish smile spread over his face as he tendered the bouquet. It was built in native fashion. Circular tiers of Persian roses, and white gardenias starting from a fringe of green foliage, converged towards a centre formed by a gilded orange, into the middle of which was stuck a sprig of myrtle. It was heavy with string and

stalk, each blossom being mounted upon a firm unbending stick. In addition, it was dripping with the muddy water of the garden tank, where it had been soaking since early morning.

"Oh my ! now, Naga, what have you been doing ?" giggled Miss Bullen, as he pushed the nosegay into her hands.

He did not answer, but with a broadening smile presented the cake.

In its way it was quite as wonderful a creation as the bouquet. Resting on the commonest of stoneware plates, it was covered with pink-and-white sugar. Pink-and-white paper frills, such as adorn hams and cutlets at a restaurant, decorated its base. A wreath of silver leaves formed a kind of eaves to its flat crown, which had the words, "For dear Daisy," done in pink sugar on the snowy icing. The centre was ornamented by a sugar parrot holding a silver heart in its beak. For this marvellous confection Naga had paid a quarter of his month's salary, but he did not grudge the money. If Englishmen made love with presents, he could take a lesson out of their books and demonstrate his affection in the same way.

"Oh my !" ejaculated the astonished girl several times. "What will my pappa say ?"

The tailor, seeing Miss Bullen's attention diverted from himself, rose from his mat, and sneaked out to the back of the house, where he

had hidden a small bag that contained the tin pot from which he quenched his thirst. The bag also contained some private work of his own for which he had a contract. Out came the needle and cotton—Miss Bullen's cotton—and the thread flew rapidly backwards and forwards, whilst his ear was bent to hear the call to summon him from "drinking water only" in the yard.

But Daisy was fully occupied with her cousin. Like most Eurasian maidens she dearly loved cake, and her eyes shone with pleasant anticipation as she examined the gift.

"What a beauty! Gracious! Naga, what a lot of money you must have paid for it! But what will my pappa say?" she concluded, with a pricking of conscience.

"Has Corporal Barnes ever given you a cake?" asked the policeman, jealously.

"Oh my! no;" and she laughed again.

"He does not love you as I do," said Naga, amorously. "Look at the words on the top, 'For dear Daisy.' And you see this bird? That is Naga's heart which he has in his beak. He is bringing it to dear Daisy."

"Oh, Naga, how you go on! You must not talk like that."

She carried the cake and the bouquet to the sitting-room, and placed them on the table. She examined the pink-and-white trimmings, and

touched the silver foliage delicately with her fingers, Naga looking on with exulting affection.

They were alone, Mrs. Bullen having gone to her room under the pretext of mending the children's clothes. In reality she was indulging in a "black man's holiday," that afternoon nap which is indispensable to the early-rising native of the East. Naga grew bolder in the seclusion of the room, and took a creaking step towards her.

"You like it? You like the bird; the sugar; the silver leaves? Those leaves came off wedding-flowers. It is almost a wedding-cake," continued Naga, his courage growing. Oh, Daisy, my father says that he is looking for a wife for me. Why should I not follow your custom and look for a wife for myself?"

Daisy hung her head demurely over the sugar parrot as she answered—

"You are not like us, Naga. You must do as your father tells you."

He drew himself up with a newborn independence.

"I will not obey him. I am a man, and I will choose for myself. I have made my choice, and sent my heart to you, Daisy, the only girl I have ever loved."

He sighed deeply, and again the boots creaked as he approached nearer still.

"Daisy," he whispered, "haven't I always loved you ever since we played trains together?"

Shall I tell you something? Last Christmas I brought you some cocoa-nut sweets. Those sweets were made by a woman who is clever at magic. She put a love-potion in them, which she said would bring me into favour with the girl who ate them. The spell was to take nearly a year in working. The time is up, and now I know that you will love me."

He put his arm round her waist, and kissed her before she was aware of what was coming.

"Ah! now! stop it, Naga!" she cried, with a little scream of dismay. "I tell you, stop it! Oh my! What will my pappa and my mamma say?"

"He'll say that—and that," thundered the voice of Bullen behind them, as he brought his stick down with two resounding thwacks upon the ardent lover's back.

"Oh my! I did not know that you were there, pappa," exclaimed Daisy, with real fright, as she fled towards the back verandah, leaving Naga to face the storm.

Ben, having expressed himself in that vigorous manner, demanded an explanation.

"Now then, young man, what are you adoing of with that girl of mine?"

The discomposed policeman stood erect and faced his uncle. He was hurt not so much in the flesh—for Bullen had not used his cane heavily—as in the spirit. He had been beaten

before his lady-love by her own father. His reply was not without dignity.

"I was going to ask her to be my wife."

"Oh ! you were, were you ? And who are you to dare to ask a European to be your wife ?"

"I am a police-peon now, as my father was, but I shall be promoted by-and-by. If Daisy will marry me, I will give her as good a house to live in as this, and I will keep her as an Englishwoman should be kept."

Naga spoke in good faith, and his earnestness softened the anger of the older man ; but it did not kill the withering scorn that was manifest in every word as the Englishman replied—

"What are you ? You're a heathen. What's my daughter ? She's a Christian. What's your colour ? Black. What's Daisy's ? Almost as white as my own. And you dare to ask her to marry you ?"

Naga's face fell under this crude description of the difference in birth and religion between himself and his cousin. Still, he was not to be easily daunted, and he said with some eagerness—

"I can come Christian."

"What's the good of that ? You can't change your colour with your religion."

"Colour did not matter to you when you took my mother's sister," rejoined the policeman, quickly.

Ben was posed for the fraction of a minute, but speech came almost immediately.

"That was different. I was the man and the native was the woman. In your case the native is the man. A native dares to lift his eyes to the daughter of an Englishman! What infernal impudence!" cried Bullen, his anger growing at the bare contemplation of such a crime.

"If my mother's sister had married among her own people, my father would have made her daughter my wife three years ago," said Naga, with some defiance.

"But since I have married her, your father won't presume to think that her daughter will be allowed to mate with his son. The English have taught him and his kind a lesson since they first came to the country. It seems to me that we shall have to teach some of you young fellows that lesson over again before long, if you don't mind."

Naga's eyes flashed angrily. It was humiliating enough to have his suit rejected with scorn, but abuse was altogether unmerited. He replied with some spirit—

"Things were much better for us before the English showed their white faces in this country to turn the heads of our women. Those good old times have gone, and such as I am, are trampled under foot."

The old pensioner rounded upon him with a contempt that echoed in every word.

“Good old times, do you call them? What would you have been in the good old times? A slave! a down-trodden, Roger-ridden” (he meant Rajah) “slave! That’s what you would have been. And what are you now? The English Government has made a police-peon of you. You get regular pay, fine clothes, a big turban, and you wear boots. If the collector or the judge happen to pass you on the road you salute, and walk on, because the Government allows that the road belongs as much to you as it does to them. But in those good old days, as you call them, if you saw a Roger a-coming along the road, you had to get off—yes, and crawl on your hands and knees in the gutter till he had gone by. And if he had caught a sight of your fine clothes, he would have had every one of them off your back. As for your boots, he would have cut off your hand and foot for daring to wear them, and you would have thought yourself lucky to have got off with your life. Nice times they were, to be sure.”

This tirade left Ben’s aspiring nephew silent. He turned to go.

“Here, take away that trash,” said Bullen, determined to make what he called a good job of the business and extinguish the last ray of hope that might linger in the lover’s mind. He pointed to the circular nosegay and the ridiculous cake. “My daughter is not for you nor your likes.”

"I suppose you mean her for Corporal Barnes," observed Naga, with bitterness, as he possessed himself of the rejected offerings.

"That's just about it; and if you don't take care you will have him after you. If he catches you at any of them games he'll give you what-for, or my name ain't Ben Bullen."

Naga departed crestfallen, unhappy, and angry. He cursed the fate that made him a son of India. He cursed the white man who, in his opinion—formed on the spot—oppressed his race. So vexed was his soul that he forgot to make his boots "talk," as he trod heavily back to his home, carrying the rejected offerings which had cost him so much. On his way he passed Corporal Barnes, accompanied by his friend Corporal Spring. They were bending their steps towards Bullen's house. As the men went by they treated the unhappy policeman to a little mild chaff. On ordinary occasions such chaff was usually received with a broad, good-humoured smile.

"Hallo, Bobby! Going to see your best girl? Give her a kiss from me," cried Barnes, his amused eyes upon the cake and flowers.

"Don't forget to ask me to the wedding, old man," said Spring; and they passed on without noticing the angry scowl upon the brow of the police-peon.

A few paces further on Naga stopped to look back. It was as he suspected. The Englishmen

mounted the steps of the verandah and vanished behind the bamboo curtain. A very different welcome awaited them from the one accorded to him, and the flame of his wrath burnt brighter.

He hastened on towards his own house, and calling his sisters from the enclosed courtyard into which the women's apartments opened, he said—

“Here, little sister, here is a cake for you ; and here, little one, is a bouquet for you.”

He pushed the despised cake and flowers into their eager hands, and made no answer to the numerous questions they put as to the reason of his action.

“Stay, brother, and eat some with us,” they cried.

“I have no time to waste,” he answered gruffly.

They regarded him with gentle surprise. “You told us at midday that you had holiday until to-morrow morning,” they said.

“Holiday ! What do I want with a holiday ?” he returned bitterly. “What I want is promotion, and for that one must work or——”

He left the children and walked moodily out of the house. Yes, there are two roads to promotion. By hard work—that is the tedious road. The quicker way is to set one's foot on the neck of one's enemy. That is also the sweeter.

CHAPTER X

WHEN Bullen, in accordance with the wishes of his wife, settled at Cuddalore, he did so on condition that there should be no familiar intercourse between the heads of the families of the two sisters. The children had met in the street and in the verandah of his house, and he had silently permitted this in his easy good nature, perhaps against his better judgment. The result of this leniency was shown in Naga's action. It was too late to undo the past; but the affair was not without its remedy. Bullen was anxious that no friction should occur between the police-peon and the corporal. It was possible that Barnes might feel the indignity of having a rival who was a native. If he suspected for a moment that Daisy had given Naga any encouragement, the smart English corporal would retire from the field in high dudgeon. Bullen intended to reveal the relationship just before the marriage, and to point out at the same time that when Daisy entered the regiment she would break the links that bound her to her mother's people, and would become a

European to all intents and purposes on the strength of the regiment.

Bullen, much perplexed, sought counsel with Brand, who was ready as usual with sage advice. The story of Naga's delinquency was told.

"I'm sorry for the young fellow, and that's the real truth," concluded Ben, with puckered brow. "But how he dared to think of marrying a European beats me ; that fare so bumptious."

"They are a bumptious, impudent lot nowadays. It would teach them a lesson if we were to farm them out to Roossia for ten years. I bet they would be glad enough to eat humble pie at the end of the time, and would come back to us and our rule with thankful hearts."

"You're right, bor ; you're quite right. And now what do you think I had better do about this young chap ?"

"You must speak to his father, and ask him to push on his marriage with some native girl, according to their custom. When once he has a wife, the lad will give no further trouble."

"I don't know whether Soobarow can afford it just yet," replied Bullen, doubtfully.

"Offer to lend him something towards it ; then you will have a hold on him. He will take the money as readily as a cat will take cream. Have you got it ?"

"Yes, I've got it all right." He added, after

a slight pause, "There's a bit of money put by for the missus ; more than enough for that."

"You have been more careful than I have," replied his companion. "I have nothing but my pension and what I earn over——"

He glanced at Ben with a twinkle in his eye, and left the sentence unfinished.

"What you earn over the fishing," said Bullen. At which they both laughed heartily, and Brand continued—

"I have no children like you, so what is the good of my saving ? And, after all, it may yet be paid back. But, mind you, Ben, between ourselves, I don't look for its repayment ; I don't want it. I gave it willingly in as good a cause as ever man had to spend his money ; and I would do it again ten times over without any regret. I shall feel very bad the day that money comes back to me."

Ben cast a look of pride upon his old friend as he said—

"You always were such a gentleman, you were."

There was silence for a while. Brand's eyes softened as his thoughts wandered from the subject under discussion. He was unconscious of his friend's gaze, and started slightly as Bullen said gently—

"You will never marry now."

"Never," replied Brand, with sudden emphasis,

"I am not like you, Ben. If I had ever met the kind of woman I might have fancied, I would never have dared to ask her; and those I would have dared to ask, I wouldn't have."

"And you have never met her—the one you dared not ask?" ventured Ben, instinctively aware that he was treading on delicate ground.

"I wouldn't say one way or the other. The mere mention of it seems like an offence."

There was that in his tone which intimated that the topic must be dropped, and Bullen took the hint. He dismissed the subject by saying—

"You're too old for marriage now, bor. That sort of thing must be left to the young people, so we will go back to Naga. Shall I offer to lend the money?"

"Send your wife to talk to her sister, and let her make the offer of the loan in your name on condition that they fix up the wedding in a few weeks. Most likely they have had their eye upon a girl for some time past and are at loggerheads over the money to be put down in jewels. Or perhaps they are waiting for Naga's promotion."

After further discussion it was decided that Mrs. Bullen should be deputed to approach her sister on the matter. That good lady's bosom swelled with pride as her husband unfolded his scheme. Long as he had been in the country he was scarcely aware of the importance attached to

money-lending by the natives and the prestige which the transaction conferred upon the lender.

Mrs. Bullen had been in the habit of paying occasional visits to her sister, but they were more or less surreptitious. After dark, when she had ostensibly gone to see to the cooking of the supper, she slipped out by the little door in the back yard and stole a blissful half-hour of betel-chewing and gossip in the house of the head-constable. But of this Bullen knew nothing. If by chance he became aware of her absence, the reason for it was given by the kitchen-woman with glib tongue. The missus had stepped out to buy fresh coffee or some forgotten necessary for the house.

But now things were changed, and Mrs. Bullen was to call on her sister in broad daylight by her husband's request. She quite understood the explanation made by Ben after the children were in bed. The disposal of the obstructive Naga must be at once, and a loan of money at a moderate rate of interest was a plan which commended itself to Mrs. Bullen in every way.

The next morning a message was sent by one of the young Bullens to say that the wife of the pensioner would call upon the wife of the head-constable at four o'clock in the afternoon. The message stirred the household to its last member, and there was much speculation from Soobarow downwards as to the reason of the visit.

The house of the head-constable stood in the same street as that of the pensioner, the distance between the two being less than a quarter of a mile. When Mrs. Bullen crept down the length of it to see her sister under cover of darkness, it took her just four minutes to go from door to door. But on this occasion Daisy declared that it would be quite impossible for her mother to walk, and that she must have a carriage.

"But Daisy, child, think what my sister will say."

"And what will she say, mamma?"

"Oh my! She will say that I am making myself too glorious."

"What an idea! She will never dare to talk in that way. But wait a minute." Daisy went into the verandah where her father sat with his pipe. "Pappa, don't you think that mamma ought to go to the head-constable's house to-day in a carriage?"

"What! A one-hoss coach?" asked Bullen, who clung to the old term in preference to the more modern word. His daughter's proposal took his breath away, and he regarded her in blank astonishment. "Why can't she walk?"

"Mamma can walk all right; but when a lady goes out calling she ought to have a carriage. What did my grandmamma do when she paid visits?"

"She never paid any visits except to her sister who lived in Lowestoft."

"And did she walk to Lowestoft?"

"Why no, child. That's twelve miles from Beccles to Lowestoft if it's an inch. She used to go by carrier. He had a van and a rare good horse, and being friendly with him mother used to say that it was just like having a coach of her own."

Bullen resumed his pipe as his thoughts went back to the past.

"We have no carrier here, so my mamma must have a carriage," said Daisy, decisively.

Bullen, who was a careful man, brought his mind to bear on the subject. He was quite willing to indulge his wife and daughter in any reasonable fancy, and consented to the hiring of a conveyance. But he stipulated that it should take the form of a pony-jutka, a country vehicle resembling a small wooden box mounted on two large wheels, the hiring of which cost considerably less than a hack carriage.

At half-past three Mrs. Bullen, arrayed in a marvellous *robe de visite*, stood at the top of the verandah steps and surveyed the jutka which had been hired at four annas for any distance within the mile. Her dress was a purple merino skirt and jacket. Over this was draped a white muslin saree bordered with gold. On her feet were white cotton stockings and brown shoes. Her

ample figure gleamed with gold jewels, and her soft, fat fingers bore many rings.

Attended closely by Daisy, who had been assisting at her mother's toilette, she slowly descended the steps, and devoted a whole minute to instructing the urchin, who fulfilled the duty of coachman, as to the route. As Daisy and her mother both spoke at once, and the younger children added their counsels all at the top of their voices, it was a marvel that the shaven-headed youth understood a single word of their commands. The door of the vehicle opened at the back. Mrs. Bullen, with Daisy's assistance, pushed her way into it, whilst Jehu leaned forward and threw his weight upon the shafts to relieve the strain upon the harness.

By this time a little crowd of spectators had assembled in the street, and their presence added to the general satisfaction of the Bullen family. The signal was given, and the whip cracked round the knock-kneed legs of the pony, whilst Daisy continued to give her mother reminders of all that she had to do. The dusty pony, after backing into the crowd and dispersing it quicker than it had gathered, threw itself into its collar with a jerk that snapped one of the many straps of its trappings. It started off at a gallop down the street in the opposite direction to the house of the head-constable. At sight of the loosened strap, Daisy, fearing for the safety of her mother,

screamed after the swaying jutka ; but the imp at the end of the reins took no notice of her commands to stop. He knew his steed too well to trifle with its temper and court a fit of jibbing before his fare was well on her way. He preferred to take the risk of an accident and let the strap swing, especially as the buckle performed the part of a whip and kept the pony going.

They rattled in a cloud of dust to the bazaar, where Mrs. Bullen stopped at the grain merchant's stall to complain of the quality of the last bushel of rice, and to order some more. She remained inside the jutka, and waved a jewelled hand through the open window to emphasize her words. The grain merchant, seated on the raised platform of his stall amongst his grain bags, listened in silence, and continued to chew betel-nut, unmoved by the relation of Mrs. Bullen's remarks on the shocking inferiority of the rice. As is the custom in the East, every passer-by stopped to hear what the lady had to say, and to put in a word of criticism or approval as fancy dictated. When she at length gave the man an opportunity of speaking, he assured her, after the manner of his kind all over the world, that he regretted her anger ; he was glad to say that he had just got in some fresh grain of superior quality, which he was sure her husband would like. Relations gradually became less strained, and Mrs. Bullen and her tradesman parted on

the best of terms in the midst of a circle of spectators.

Having traversed the chief streets of Cuddalore on various pretexts, the jutka came round towards the point of departure, and pulled up at the house of the head-constable. Mrs. Bullen did not attempt to descend from her chariot until the whole household had assembled. Her exit was made backwards, a tanned leather shoe appearing first, then purple drapery and gleaming gold, whilst the ringed fingers clung to the sides of the carriage. As she lowered herself to the ground, the ill-constructed jutka inclined at a sharp angle, that sent the shafts above the back of the pony, and caused the driver to glance round apprehensively ; but as she detached herself from the vehicle, it regained its equilibrium with a severe jerk, without any further damage to the dilapidated harness.

Mrs. Bullen paid the fare to the urchin, and, in addition, presented him with a quarter of an anna—the value of a farthing—as a present. He received it with an obsequious “Salaam, lady,” a mode of address used towards an English-woman, and, reining in his hard-mouthed pony, he waited to witness the greeting before starting in quest of a fresh fare.

Mrs. Soobarow, mindful of her dignity, did not cross the threshold to receive her sister, but remained standing in the passage. Her family,

having no dignity to preserve, were able to indulge their curiosity to its fullest extent. They grouped themselves on the verandah steps, and Mrs. Bullen, conscious that she was the centre of observation, shook hands with each in turn, saying "Good marning" in English, and adding a few words of greeting in her own tongue. When at length she reached her sister, and their hands met in the unusual hand-clasp, Mrs. Bullen said "How-do-you-do-good-marning-sister" in her best European manner, and her heart glowed with pride as she noted the impression which her foreign style had made upon the assembly.

Having inquired after the health of the family, she was conducted to the women's quarters near the kitchen, whence proceeded a penetrating smell of onions. A chair was brought, and Mrs. Bullen seated herself like a European, whilst her sister was content to stand by her side for the present. The rest of the household, including the kitchen-woman and her daughter, gathered round in an admiring circle to listen, whilst Mrs. Bullen replied to a series of questions concerning the health of her own family. Twenty minutes were passed in this gratifying manner, when Mrs. Soobarow asked her sister if she would not like to look at a new gold bangle, which her husband had lately purchased for his daughter's wedding. As the two sisters entered the private room of Mrs. Soobarow, the signal was given for the

dispersion of the rest of the company. Her two daughters endeavoured to follow their mother, but they were sent off to draw water, with peremptory orders to set about their task at once.

The room was lighted by one small window, too high in the wall to be reached by curious eyes. The furniture consisted of two or three grass mats, a string cot covered with striped cotton rugs, a jar of drinking water, a cheap paraffin lamp, and a few odd pillows encased in turkey-red, some on the cot and some lying on the mats. In a corner was a cotton quilt rolled up to be out of the way in the day, this being the usual method of "making the beds" in the morning with the natives. As the privacy of the bedroom enveloped the wife of the Englishman, so did the English manner fall away from her like a garment.

Mrs. Bullen's first act was to remove the smart brown leather shoes and white stockings. Then she seated herself upon the cot, and instinctively drew up her feet tailor-fashion, after the custom of her maternal forebears. Mrs. Soobarow followed her example, and, having comfortably settled herself, opened her betel-bag. With tender solicitude she prepared the dainty morsel for her sister, wrapping the dried slices of areca-nut, the pinch of lime, and a touch of aromatic spice in the fresh green betel-leaf. As she placed the neat roll in her guest's mouth, she

cracked all her finger-joints to keep off the evil spirits.

“Do you eat betel at home, sister?” she asked.

“When the toddy-cat mates with the house-cat, she must be content to drink cow’s milk all her days. Yet there are many things which may be done under the eye of an Englishman, and he sees nothing.”

They were speaking in their own tongue, and Mrs. Bullen slipped back into the figurative speech of the country.

“They are simple creatures—foolish elephants of men that know not their strength,” remarked the wife of the head-constable. “As the thunny-fish knows the depths of the sea, so do we women of this country know the strength of our husbands’ arms. Yours has never beaten you, you have often told me.”

She glanced sharply, and not without envy, at the buxom Mrs. Bullen, who laughed comfortably, and in a manner that ratified the words of her reply.

“No; he has never raised his hand upon me. Nevertheless, Mr. Bullen must be obeyed in all great matters, and it is by his orders that I am here.”

“You have something to tell, sister. Does it concern Pondicherry and the trade? Several times has my husband caught the Lumbadees,

and made them pay fines. It was with that money, and some given him by Mr. Berrand, that he bought the gold bangle which I will presently show you. The Polliss Master is very anxious to catch the Lumbadees, and put them in prison. But he will not do it. My husband says that it will bring too much trouble. The Lumbadees do not mind paying a fine, but they do not like to go to prison. It interferes with their trade. When my husband tried to explain to the Polliss Master that fining without going to court was best, he became angry, and would not comprehend. He said that it was law-breaking to fine without the consent of the court, which is a thing that neither the polliss nor the people understand."

"Knowledge, like the young wife, is best kept at home. Moreover, why should you open the shutters and let the storm blow through your house to your own hurt?" replied Mrs. Bullen, sympathetically.

The other wagged her head in assent as she remarked—

"And therefore my husband is unable to satisfy the Polliss Master as he would wish. If he spoke of the fines, and it became known, the storm would indeed destroy us. It is not of the liquor trade that you would speak, sister?"

"Not to-day; it is of Naga's marriage that I came to talk. Is it arranged?" The question

was asked with a certain show of indifference, which, however, did not deceive.

“Why do you want to know?”

“Mr. Bullen is interested in the boy, and wishes to be present as a guest. You told me, sister, that the wedding was to take place soon after the new year. The time is approaching, but you have said nothing more.”

Mrs. Soobarow's eyes sought the single beam of light that penetrated her dim bower, and she hesitated before replying—

“We have decided to put it off for the present.”

“Is the girl not satisfactory?”

“It is her father who makes the trouble. People who climb the rock for eagles' eggs are apt to fall. After the fall they will content themselves with the eggs of the village fowl; therefore we wait.”

“They ask too big a sum?” conjectured Mrs. Bullen.

“It is so, and we have withdrawn. My husband is contracting for the marriage of our daughter. The man is not young, but he is well-to-do, and has no children. He asks for little else but a strong, healthy girl such as ours is.”

“But it is time Naga married, sister,” protested the wife of the pensioner. “He will give you trouble and choose for himself if you do not act. The young bull is hard to lead beneath the

yoke if he is left too long in the field. The early yoke and the still earlier nose-rope make the gentlest and best of beasts."

Mrs. Soobarow fingered the gold bangles which clasped the plump arms of Mrs. Bullen.

"Your husband is rich ; these are worth a large sum of money. How can we, who are so poor, find jewels like these for our son ? Yet these—ay, and more than these, are what the father of the girl asks."

"You do not give the cow all she bellows for, no matter how good a milker she may be. Over-fed beasts are apt to turn on you and toss. Let him ask all he pleases, but give only what is customary."

Mrs. Soobarow made no reply to this sage advice, but called to the kitchen-woman to bring coffee. The aromatic odour so dear to the nostrils of the Oriental heralded its advent. Mrs. Bullen felt her heart warm towards her sister as she handed her a steaming cup. A plate of sweets was placed on the cot between the two ladies.

"My son says there is no hurry about his marriage ; he is content to wait."

"Meanwhile you have no grandson, sister ; and no daughter-in-law to help you. It is not the rule of your husband's people to take counsel with the children as it is with the people of my husband. Your children are natives, and must be treated as such. You will have to turn a deaf ear

to the boy's words, and marry him to the woman you choose. How much money have you ? ”

“Not enough to do more than pay for the wedding of our daughter. Now, if your husband had been a man of this country, sister, should we not long ago have arranged a marriage between your daughter and my son ? ” asked the wife of the head-constable.

“My daughter is to marry one of the soldiers of the camp. Her father has decreed it,” replied Mrs. Bullen, shortly and decisively.

The other lifted the tray of sweets, and offered them to her visitor.

“They are of the very best. I bought them this morning. When the Brahminy bull comes to one's house, beans of gold are not too good for him. Ah ! I wish that my husband were as rich as yours. Then the marriage of Naga might be made without any delay,” said Mrs. Soobarow, with an appropriate sigh of envy which was not lost upon her hearer.

Mrs. Bullen did not deny the imputation of wealth, but smiled with encouragement, keeping silence in the hope that her sister would ask the favour of a loan. There was a distinct advantage in pushing Mrs. Soobarow into the position of the suppliant, while she played the gracious lady-benevolent and dictated her own terms. But the wife of the head-constable was the elder of the two, and she had no desire to put herself into such a

position. She broke away from the subject which lay so near the hearts of both, and remarked on the dearness of bazaar prices. Mrs. Bullen pursued the new topic with alacrity, and dilated at length on the mode of serving meals in the pensioner's house, dwelling on the fact that she ate her food at a table with her husband, and was not obliged to wait until he had finished. It was a tale which had been repeated more than once, but it never failed to hold the attention of Mrs. Soobarow, who, following the custom of her nation, did not take any meal until her husband and sons had been served.

A whole hour went by, and the two sisters continued to skirmish around without coming much nearer to the point. Mrs. Soobarow arrived at the knowledge that the Bullens desired to see Naga married. She had not been told of his escapade, but she could divine the reason. Mrs. Bullen was equally aware that her sister was longing to ask for the loan which would make Naga's wedding possible, but shrank, as elder sister, from humbling herself to solicit a favour.

Mrs. Bullen descended from her perch upon the cot, and began to put on her stockings and shoes, with protestations that it was late, and she must be going. This had the effect of driving the other to desperation. The opportunity which had come seemed slipping from her grasp. She rushed headlong back to the momentous question.

"If we married Naga soon after the new year, would you come to the wedding?" she asked.

"Certainly, without doubt," replied Mrs. Bullen.

"But we are too poor," cried her sister, with well-simulated despair. "If only we had a little of your wealth. But English people do not lend to natives, though they often borrow from them."

"And pay high interest," rejoined Mrs. Bullen, quickly.

"That is true, for the sowcar is more grasping than the Englishman. When your husband lends money, he doubtless charges but a small interest."

Mrs. Bullen appeared to be absorbed in the contemplation of her shoes.

"These shoes were bought of a Madras hawker. They are not country-made, but English; and they cost twelve rupees," she said.

"They become you well, sister. You have all the look of an Englishwoman. Hide but the tail of a goat, and the world takes him for a sheep. It is only your complexion that betrays you. In every other respect you have the appearance of a European."

The flattery was not lost upon Mrs. Bullen, who rose to her feet preparatory to taking leave.

"I have lived so many years with an Englishman that it is not to be wondered at that I am like him, though not of his nation. Even the string that binds the roses smells sweet. If

there is any service that my husband can render yours, do not hesitate to speak. Mr. Bullen was always of a kind heart and condescending nature."

The mention of her husband by name, a thing that the wife of the native would not dare to do, reminded Mrs. Soobarow of her sister's superiority. Casting all her pride to the winds, she cried—

"Sister, sister!"—as Mrs. Bullen walked towards the door, with a gesture intimating that the conversation and the visit were at an end. "Sister, I have a favour to ask, but fear to name it."

The other turned, her face beaming with benevolent satisfaction.

"A favour!" she exclaimed, with well-simulated surprise. "Why, what favour can the Englishman possibly grant to the head-constable?"

"It concerns our son's marriage. If your husband could lend the money, it might be possible to accomplish the wedding."

"How soon would you require it?"

Mrs. Soobarow understood what was beneath the question, and her reply was to the point.

"We ought to have it soon, if the marriage is to take place immediately after the new year. But without the money, the wedding is impossible."

The wife of the pensioner shook her head dubiously. She was enjoying the situation far too well to allow the matter to proceed hastily.

"We have very little to spare, for there are many expenses in the house of an Englishman

which a native has not got. Then there is Daisy's wedding. I fear it cannot be managed."

Mrs. Bullen pondered in deep thought with puckered brow, as though it grieved her to the heart to have to refuse. But her sister was not to be deceived. Now that the plunge had been taken, her tongue was loosened, and she pleaded volubly, and with increasing hope, as Mrs. Bullen raised more objections on the principle that it is a mistake to grant favours too hastily.

The two ladies seated themselves on a mat, and Mrs. Soobarow prepared a fresh offering of betel. After beating about the bush for another thirty minutes, it was settled that fifty rupees should be lent at a moderate rate of interest—far less than any native would charge—and the date was fixed for the new year.

Mrs. Bullen presently departed, having once more assumed her best English manner. On the threshold she shook hands with all the members of the family and bade them good night.

"Mr. Bullen will never consent to the loan," she vehemently asserted. "I shall have trouble to soothe the anger he will feel at the request having been made. But I will do my best to serve you."

Her words indicated the importance of the favour to be granted, but did not for a moment deceive Mrs. Soobarow, who once more cracked her fingers above her sister's head to keep off the evil spirits.

CHAPTER XI

MISS HENSLEY's proposal to pay a visit to Bangalore met with the full approval of her *fiancé*. Not only was he much engrossed by his work, but he was also anxious to go into the district where his presence was needed in more than one spot.

She accordingly left Cuddalore three days after her interview with Davenport. They saw each other during those three days, as it was impossible to avoid meeting ; but by mutual consent it was always in public, when the presence of others was a safeguard against dropping into dangerous subjects. Certainly, by the time Marion left, all her friends agreed that a change was necessary, and that the cooler climate of Bangalore would restore her health and her spirits, which had flagged of late.

Mr. Hensley, seizing the opportunity of his daughter's absence, started on a camping tour, bent on doing that mysterious business known as "jamabundee," when the tax is assessed on the appearance of the crops. The police-officer and

his guest missed their hospitable host, and dined more frequently at home.

"How are you progressing towards making the acquaintance of your heiress?" asked Rex, one evening after dinner.

He had no desire to seem inhospitable, but it was becoming necessary to explain to his friend, that the district claimed him for a while, as it had claimed the collector, and that he must soon go under canvas. It meant taking away the cook and the butler, and leaving the bungalow in charge of the kitchen-woman and the watchman. It would be inconvenient to have a second European in camp, for the simple reason that he had only enough camp kit for himself. If Davenport could be persuaded to go sight-seeing to Madras, or to Ootacamund, or Bangalore for a few weeks, he would be glad to see him again on his return, and they might spend Christmas together. His inquiry concerning Owen's progress with his heiress-hunt was not made in idle curiosity.

"I think I told you that she asked for money, which I sent, according to her directions, to Bangalore. The young woman takes her time about replying. Her last letter requests me to go to Bangalore, as she wishes to see me, and hear more about her aunt."

"Does she name a time?"

"Next week will suit her Majesty."

"And that will also suit me exactly," replied

Rex, with hearty approval of the plan. "I must go out into camp before long. I shall be away a fortnight or three weeks. You will have time to look about you and make an expedition to our best show place in the south, Seringapatam. Marion will be at Bangalore, and through her you will have any number of introductions."

Rex ran on with his proposals for the employment of himself and of Owen, as well as Miss Hensley during the next few weeks. In his eagerness he failed to notice the silence which had fallen upon his friend.

The temptation to grasp at any excuse, however feeble, of gravitating towards Marion had already assailed Davenport, but hitherto he had resisted it. In answer to the request of Miss Tregethin, he had despatched a letter regretting his inability to go to Bangalore, to which she had replied by repeating her request, giving as a reason her inability to meet him elsewhere. Her decision troubled him. If he was to fulfil his promise to Mrs. Myrtle, he was bound to have an interview. Circumstances were driving him down a road that was not of his own choosing, and his inner consciousness warned him of danger ahead.

When Rex finished the elaboration of their plans for the immediate future, and found that there was no response, he asked, with sudden apprehension—

"Do you intend to refuse to meet Miss Tregethin? I understand that this was the very thing that brought you out to India."

"So it was, old fellow. To be honest——" He laughed awkwardly, and hesitated.

"Yes? Don't be afraid to say what you wish. I shall not be shocked."

"Well, to be honest, now that the time has come to see the lady I am in search of, I am the victim of a sudden fit of shyness. What am I to say to her?"

"Ask her to go home with you, of course," replied Rex, in some surprise. "Wasn't that your object from the very beginning?"

"But suppose she won't go; what then?"

"Then you pledged yourself to ask her to be your wife. And if you set yourself to win a woman's heart I will back you to succeed."

"Supposing she is ugly, disagreeable, wild-cattish——"

"Say, rather, that supposing she is beautiful, fascinating, kittenish, which seems far more likely, considering her romantic past," said Rex, watching his friend with puzzled eyes, and quite at a loss to understand this new phase. "Of course if you really object to going, perhaps I could arrange for you to come with me. I could borrow the necessary kit. But you won't like roughing it. Life in camp isn't like this, and you must be in the saddle or, worse still, in the

cart, jolting over country roads for some hours every morning."

"No, no," burst hastily from Owen's lips, as he brought his thoughts from the clouds. "No, certainly not. I utterly refuse to go into camp with you. I am not a sportsman, and I hate roughing it." There was a slight pause, and he added, "Since Fate seems to decree it, I must go to Bangalore and interview the heiress."

"I shall tell Marion when I next write, that you are coming, and she will see that you are not lonely," Rex said heartily.

"Please don't trouble Miss Hensley" answered the other, with a suspicion of impatience in his voice, which reduced his friend to silence.

The police-officer rose from his seat and glanced at his guest, whose thoughts had again wandered far afield. Not wishing to break in upon the reverie, he refrained from giving the invitation which was upon his lips, and sauntered out into the moonlit garden by himself.

Carwardine was one of those men who are curiously susceptible to the influences of nature. During the hours of the day he was the hard-headed, practical, unemotional police-officer, relying more upon his reason and experience, than an intuitive shrewdness, to unravel the meshes of crime with which his profession brought him in contact. At night, something awoke within him which dominated reason and set experience at

naught. When, after a languid day of heat, the breeze swept inland from the sea, and the tropical night flowers shed forth their heavy scents to lure the great hawk moths; when the stars, unsullied by a breath of fog, shone from a velvet sky, and the moon floated in a soft haze over the ocean; then it was that Rex felt his pulses quicken and his brain grow clear; his perception became more acute, and his soul seemed to open out like the night flowers. Cases over which he puzzled by day in vain, unlocked their secrets under the spell of the quiet hours of the night, and the solution of the mysteries he was professionally called upon to solve came as if by magic.

It was the witchery of a certain night that had made him the *fiancé* of Miss Hensley. By the broad light of day he was mildly astonished at his own temerity. Miss Hensley herself had doubted his sincerity for a brief moment, when the impassioned lover of the evening before had proved prosaic almost to dulness at the lunch-table. Could it be possible that the words, which had prevailed only a few hours ago, were uttered by the man who was now talking shop with her father? A lover's *tête-à-tête* amongst the ferns after dinner reassured her that she had made no mistake as far as Rex was concerned.

With his mind alert, and his heart in sympathy with the allurements of the soft Indian

night, Rex wandered amongst the flower-beds of his garden. He was thinking of the gipsies among other matters. Only that morning the lame mother had pleaded again for her son, and, on his refusal to withdraw the charge, she departed with many grumblings mingled with vague threats. Every evening as he returned to his bungalow for dinner, the lame woman's daughter waylaid him on the road—sometimes near the club, sometimes near the entrance of the fort, and each time he passed she placed her hands together in suppliant fashion and raised pleading eyes to his—a vision of mute entreaty in the strong light of his lamps, or in the bright rays of the moon. The sight of her distress—he could not help thinking that tears shone in those appealing eyes—was disturbing, though it did not shake his determination. By her side stood the big grey dog which he had seen when they first met. The creature looked up at his mistress with a puzzled expression. Something was wrong with her, but it passed his canine intelligence to fathom the cause of her trouble. He growled uneasily and sniffed at the dog-cart, until the touch of her hand upon his head pacified the dull anger and stopped the growls.

The late moon had risen out of the sea, and was sending her rays upon the waiting moon-flowers. The beat of the surf upon the shore broke the loneliness of the old ruined fort ; and

the plaintive cry of the sea-bird, wakeful in the tropical moonlight, was in harmony with the deep tones of the ocean.

Rex left the garden and bent his steps towards the fortifications, keeping on the goat-track that ran under the wall of the glacis. He reached the main-guard entrance, which opened on the road to the cantonment, when he heard voices behind him within the fort. The tones and the words were undoubtedly English, and there was a low but hearty laugh, in which a woman joined. He retraced his steps hurriedly, whilst a dozen suspicions flashed through his mind connected with the men in camp.

An old native, bearing a basket upon his head and another one, which was empty, in his hand, glided out of the shadow of the glacis wall, and passed him with a rapid noiseless footfall.

"Stop! What have you got there?" he cried after the swiftly retreating figure, which vanished into the deep shade with the same abruptness as it had appeared. The police-officer was about to turn and pursue the man, when he was confronted by an Englishman in white trousers and shirt.

"Good evening, Mr. Carwardine," said the cheerful voice of Brand.

"Oh, it's you!" ejaculated Rex, in some astonishment.

"Yes, sir; I am just returning from one of

my fishing expeditions. Didn't you meet my man carrying the catch home? I sent him on ahead to get supper ready."

"I called after him to stop, but he took no notice. I suppose he did not recognize me."

"Did you want him, sir? Hi! Rammer-sammy. Hi! Come back, you old blackguard."

"Coming, sar," came from the dim distance of the shadowed wall.

"These natives, they have no manners nowadays. Lor! if I were a young man I would give them what-for. Here, Rammersammy! where are you?"

"Yes, sar; coming, sar!"

"Come on, then, you scoundrel," cried Brand, with a show of impatience. "Didn't you hear the gentleman call? Why, where's your basket?" he exclaimed as the old major-domo appeared again out of the shadow.

"I setting down to run back when master call. Master want basket?"

"What might you have wanted the man for, sir?" asked Brand of the police-officer.

Rex was slightly taken aback. "I did not recognize him, and thought that he might be one of the Lumbadees carrying contraband liquor."

"He don't look like a coolie, sir," protested Brand, with due respect. "I always insist on his dressing himself like a gentleman's servant, even if he has to do a little coolie work now and

then. He carries my fish. Go and fetch your basket, boy."

"Yes, sar," replied the old man, pausing for a moment as he glanced with questioning eyes from his master to the police-officer.

"Never mind, Brand. Of course I will take your word that the man was carrying your fish."

"No, you won't, sir, begging your pardon. I shall be proud to show you my catch. Rammer-sammy, you black scoundrel! why don't you go and do what the gentleman wishes? I shall have to strap you when we get home; you know I shall."

"Yes, sar," cheerfully admitted Ramaswamy, as he trotted off to do his bidding.

"You are late, Brand," remarked Rex.

"Not so late as I am some nights when the tide is awkward. The fish come in on the tide at the river mouth, and 'tis then that they are easiest to catch. I have had a long tramp on the river bank to-day and not much luck."

"Did I hear you talking with a woman just now, Brand?"

There was ever so slight a pause as Brand peered down the footpath in search of his servant.

"He's a long time coming," he said aloud to himself. Then, turning to the police-officer, he went on in his hearty tone. "Ah! that you did, sir! It was a gipsy girl. I often see her about these parts."

"Was she fishing?"

"No, sir; but she was doing the next best thing to it—buying fish of me. I let her have them cheap because of her poor lame old mother. She is very sharp with her eyes, and I never get home without her catching me and wheedling something out of my basket. I'm such a soft-hearted chap over the women. Oh! here you are, boy. Now, just show the gentleman our fish."

The basket was lowered, and Rex glanced into it. A few fish lay at the bottom on a bed of fresh seaweed; Brand put in his hand and lifted out a sole.

"There's a nice clean-looking fish, only killed half an hour ago. Will you take it for your supper, sir? Rammersammy will run round with it to the bungalow if you will have it."

"No, thank you, Brand; I have dined already. Besides, as I told you before, I don't like these river fish, I am much obliged to you all the same; they are muddy. Is that all you have caught?"

"I let the gipsy girl have the best. There's enough here for me and my friend Bullen. All right, Rammersammy, put your basket on your head and be off home."

Rex looked after the old man as he trotted away into the shadow.

"Do you expect to fill that large receptacle with fish every time you go fishing, Brand?" he asked.

"No, sir ; yet sometimes the basket is so heavy that the boy can scarcely get it home ; but that's because he will half fill it with seaweed, which he makes into cushions and sells in the bazaar."

Rex walked by the side of the pensioner towards the entrance of the fort.

"You were talking English to the gipsy girl ; does she understand the language ?"

"I am not sure that she does. But I always speak English to these black people. Haven't we conquered them ? and ain't it their business to understand when we speak to them ? I talk English to them on principle, and they know more of what I say than they choose to admit. They are such cunning devils, they are, sir."

"I overheard you telling the girl that she must be of good heart," continued Rex, glancing sharply at his companion.

"Yes, sir ; those were my very words," replied the pensioner, without the slightest sign of embarrassment.

"They referred to the trouble about her brother, of course ?"

"They did, and she was begging me to intercede, as far as I could make out by her jabber. But I am not going to meddle in what doesn't concern me. If I had my way, I'd govern these black fellows with the rope's end, instead of indulging them with a trial that is due to

Europeans and Eurasians. What they want is a proper hiding at the proper time, just as you would hide a dog. They would understand it like the dog, and the lesson would get home. Instead of that, you give them a trial with plenty of time to prepare their lies ; and the chances are that the criminal gets off altogether, and like as not, you punish the wrong man into the bargain."

"I have got the right man this time," remarked Rex, with some satisfaction.

"And why didn't you lick him on the spot, sir, and then let him go? He and his companions would have been quite satisfied with that much of the arm of the law. But now, what with the whining of the old mother, the crying of the girl, and the grumblings of the tribe at losing one of their able-bodied men, there's such a piece of work made about it, as may brew mischief. Begging your pardon, sir, you gentlemen nowadays don't know how to manage the natives. Lor ! bless me, things were very different in the old times."

Rex laughed as he replied : "The old days did for the old people who remembered the rule of Tippoo the Tiger. The young ones have forgotten their native rulers, and if I took the law into my own hands, even with a small dog-boy, I should find myself in the magistrate's court for assault." They reached the entrance of the fort and the police-officer stopped. "I will

say good night, Brand. By-the-by, don't encourage that Lumbadee girl with any hope that her brother will be let off. He is certain to get three months, and it will be one less to smuggle liquor into the camp for that time."

"Are you so sure that the Lumbadees are the offenders, sir?" asked Brand.

"Why, who else could it be?"

"There have been other strangers in the place lately besides the gipsies; but I know nothing about them except that they were often out at night. They *said* that they were catching moths, and may be that it was so. It ain't easy to saddle the right horse always, is it, sir? Well, I must be off. Good night, sir."

He was gone before Rex could reply. The police-officer turned back into the fort and followed the footpath that led to the feeding-ground of the goats. He was just a little bit ashamed of his suspicions concerning the basket carried by Ramaswamy; yet it was a satisfaction to have seen with his own eyes that it contained nothing but fish. The allusion to the entomologists startled him, but presently he laughed and put Brand's suggestion aside as ridiculous.

"He is a simple-minded old fellow with primitive ideas on government, and still cruder notions on police work. That smart valet of the Germans satisfied me that his masters were above suspicion."

Rex was near the spot where he had first encountered the gipsy girl. He moved more slowly, and glanced to right and left, half expecting to see her emerge from the shadow of the earthworks. The cactus stretched its stiff bulbous foliage into the strong light of the moon, and extended ghostly arms to warn passers-by not to approach too near the needle-pointed spines that clustered on the fleshy leaves. There was no sign of drapery, nor sound of feminine voice. He walked on till he came to a point not far from the bungalow, where the path forked, one branch going to the back of the house, and the other leading over the shoulder of the bastion upon which the bungalow stood.

The earthworks were overgrown with thorn-bushes, cactus, and tussocks of tall coarse grass, amongst which the path threaded a tortuous track. Where the glacis approached the water, the soil became marshy. Like the rest of the land upon which the fort was built, it was waste ground, open to the goat-herd and fisherman. The small inlet from the river curved through muddy banks towards a part of the bastion which still retained its facing of brick.

Except for the goats, it was desolate and deserted even by daylight, when the shy waders and watchful sandpipers held undisturbed revels in the ooze of the old moat, feasting on crabs and other delicacies that haunt brackish pools. It was

not an inviting spot, and the garden offered more pleasant attractions. A sudden curiosity overcame the police-officer, and he strode swiftly along the path towards the moat. There was a movement behind one of the bushes that bordered the track, and he heard a low growl. It was followed by a whistle which silenced the beast. Rex continued his walk, beating the ground with his stick to scare away snakes. Now and then he stopped, seeking with more eagerness than he was aware of to catch a glimpse of the gipsy girl.

Halfway down the slope of the glacis the jungle ceased and the view opened out far and near. Across the sand dunes he saw the Indian ocean, a pale, luminous sheet under the moon. Immediately below was the inlet, ruffled into tiny waves by the night breeze. A coracle of country make, such as was used by the fishermen rocked upon the water—a black spot upon the silvery ripples.

Rex would have pursued his way to the edge of the moat, but his steps were barred by a large, grey dog, which leaped into the path in front of him, and stood snarling at his feet. It seemed as though it was only waiting for a word of command to fly viciously at his throat. He moved to the right to pass the animal, but it moved also, snarling and showing its teeth. A manœuvre to the left was attended with no better result.

“Get out, you beast!” cried Rex, shaking

his stick at it. The only reply was a growl which was echoed in the long grass. A second dog joined the first, and the two angry creatures eyed the police-officer with an ugly expression.

"Hi ! You Lumbadee woman !" he called, with some irritation, in Tamil. "Call off your dogs ! I know that you are somewhere within hearing. I won't have you prowling so near my bungalow at this time of night. Call off your dogs, and get out of the fort."

There was no answer, and the police-officer stood motionless, watching the green eyes of the beasts and the occasional gleam of a white tooth.

A minute may have elapsed, when his ear caught the sound of a soft laugh beyond the dogs. His eyes had been fixed apprehensively upon their snarling jowls. He looked up quickly, and distinguished the form of the gipsy girl in the moonlight. She advanced towards the animals, and laid a hand on each. He took a step forward, and the dogs again growled fiercely. She called to him hastily to stop.

"You cannot pass," she said, in Tamil, and there was a touch of haughtiness in her tone, which did not escape his ear.

"You have no right to bar my way," he replied angrily.

"You cannot turn the Lumbadee out of the fort, whether the might be on your side or mine, for we have as much right to be here as you have."

"You Lumbadees want a lesson——" he began hotly.

"And you will give it us?" she asked, leaning over the animals, which shivered with fury. Her lips were parted in a smile that was a challenge, and her eyes shone with merriment. In spite of his annoyance, he could not help the answering smile which broke upon his own face, and robbed it of its sternness.

"You foolish child!" he replied more gently. "Let me pass; I want to go down to the water's edge."

"Not to-night, sir. You can come and look at the water to-morrow, when you shall have full possession of ground and river. To-night, it belongs to the Lumbadee."

For answer he made a forward movement, which once more excited the guardians of the girl.

"Be careful. Oh, be careful, brother," she cried in real or pretended alarm. Then, as she reduced the dogs to quiescence with the touch of her hand, she continued, "They will eat you if you are rash, and then I shall weep and die." There was no smile upon the full curved lips now, though a light seemed to sparkle in the eyes which sought his tender solicitude. "It is true, brother." She was addressing him as an equal. "Though the Englishman is hard-hearted and cruel, he has won the love of the Lumbadee girl, and she would weep and die, if

harm happened to him. Salaam, brother ; may my eyes soon rejoice again in the sight of you."

She slipped back into the shadow of the bushes after this amazing speech, leaving him dumb. He stood for a few seconds, still "held up" by the dogs, his blood tingling in his veins with emotions that were strangely mixed. Then he turned and walked back to the bungalow, whilst the dogs sniffed after his retreating figure, until they were summoned by a soft, low whistle.

As Rex entered the sitting-room, Owen rose from the writing-table, with a freshly written letter in his hand.

"I have told Miss Tregethin that I will meet her in Bangalore three days hence."

"Good ; I am sure that Marion will say that you have done the right thing."

But though he spoke of his *fiancée*, it was not she who, at that moment, occupied the mind of the police-officer.

CHAPTER XII

THE place appointed by Miss Tregethin for the meeting with Davenport was a house on St. John's Hill, Bangalore. The road in which the bungalow stood showed little sign of traffic. It ended abruptly on the edge of a vast plain of plateau land. Part of the plain was strewn with boulders, among which grew cactus and tangled shrubs. Where there was any depth of soil, the land was cultivated. Here and there gleamed broad expanses of irrigating pools, which the November showers had filled to the brim. Rugged hills with sharply defined outline rose in pearly blue upon the horizon.

On either side of the road small bungalows nestled amongst the luxuriant foliage of trees and shrubs. Each building stood in its own garden which was enclosed in a thick milk hedge. St. John's Hill—remote from the barracks and parade ground of the English garrison—is chiefly composed of such houses, which are occupied by European pensioners and retired Eurasian clerks with their families, men who have married

European or Eurasian wives, and whose homes are as thoroughly English in domestic detail as they can be made in a sub-tropical climate like that of Bangalore.

Davenport looked with some curiosity at the chimneyless roofs as the coachman drove down the length of the road. At the point where the metalled way suddenly merged into a sandy cart-track, the driver pulled up and pointed to a bungalow with his whip. The grounds of the bungalow, like the road, touched the very edge of the plateau.

Owen descended from the carriage, and took the path leading towards the house. Pomegranate and guava bushes grew thickly on both sides. The brilliant mandarine scarlet of the pomegranate blossom, outshone the deeper red of the hybiscus clustering round the bungalow. The dense foliage of the mango trees brushed the tiled roof as the cool north-east breeze swept in from the plain. Oleanders, roses, and lilies of various kinds bloomed in the garden beds in wild profusion. Under the trellissed verandah there were pots of maiden-hair ferns and Neapolitan violets.

Owen stopped at the portico and glanced round for a servant to announce his arrival, but there was no sign of one ; neither was there a gardener visible amongst the flowers. The doors stood open, and he could see into the tiny drawing-room, where muslin curtains swayed in the breeze, and

beaded bamboo blinds rustled with a gentle swish.

With some diffidence he mounted the few steps that led into the verandah. Still no one seemed to notice his footfall or pay any heed to the presence of the expected stranger. Had he been an Anglo-Indian of experience, he would have shouted "Boy" in a voice sufficiently loud to have reached the back verandah or even the kitchen beyond. But being a new arrival in the country he cast his eye round for a bell or knocker. Not finding such a thing, he entered the drawing-room, and sank into a chair near the door to await the next turn of events.

Five minutes elapsed, during which Owen, pictured Miss Tregethin as an awkward, shy, country-bred girl, who had not the courage to face the visitor she had summoned. He smiled at the extravagant picture which his fancy drew.

"Pleasant thoughts are the best of all companions, Mr. Davenport, are they not?" said the voice of a girl behind him. She spoke with a slightly foreign accent.

He rose quickly from his chair, and found himself face to face with a small figure robed in soft draperies. Her dark hair was arranged in the latest fashion, and the laces and little bits of jewellery about her neck were suggestive, like her speech, of a Frenchwoman.

"I have called to see Miss Tregethin," he said.

"Was she the subject of your thoughts just now?" she asked, lifting a pair of brown-black eyes to his with a steady gaze of inquiry. In their depths might lurk merriment and mischief, or the passion of a southern nature; but he could detect no trace of shyness nor sign of awkwardness.

"Certainly, my thoughts were of her," he replied courteously. "Are you Miss Tregethin?"

She answered his question by putting another.

"Tell me quickly; how is my aunt?"

"The last accounts were not good."

The dark eyes softened, and the delicate face was momentarily overshadowed with sadness.

"I believe that she loved me in her way. And yet——"

"Of course she loved you," replied Owen. "You will forgive me if I suggest that you did not treat her very kindly, when you forsook her at the last moment just as she was going home."

"Home!" she cried, with a sudden passion that startled him. "It was no home to me. This is my home, the land of my birth, the only home I have ever known. Why should I forsake warm sunny India, which I love with my whole heart, for your cold misty island, where the sun does not shine half the year? Look out there!" She threw up her arms to the blue hills and wild plateau land quivering under the rays of brooding heat.

He turned, obedient to her command, but though his eye swept the horizon that loomed

above the garden hedge, his interest was centred upon his companion. He brought his gaze from the hills to the slender fingers of the extended hands. Two or three rings of quaint native pattern sparkled as she dropped her arms to her side. He observed that the wedding-ring did not appear among them. His comprehensive glance was not lost upon her, and she laughed with a sudden transition from passion to merriment that bewildered him.

"It was not a husband, inquisitive man, who kept me here."

Dilys offered him a chair and bade him sit down in comfort, as she demanded at least half an hour of his society on business. Her actions were imperious, and not unlike those of a spoilt Anglo-Indian child. Yet the words which accompanied them were so full of sweetness and grace that her imperiousness only added to the charm of manner, which was rapidly fascinating her visitor. She sank into a low seat close to his side.

"Now, tell me all about my aunt," she said, in a soft cooing voice, as though she would atone for the ebullition of a minute ago.

He gave her an account of all that had passed, describing her aunt's anxiety and illness.

"And when I left England they feared that she was a dying woman. As such she received a promise from me that I would bring you home—to be honest—at any cost."

She listened, now resting upon the low seat near him, now moving noiselessly about the room. It was difficult to divine how she was affected by his story. When the tale was ended, she glided down the steps of the verandah without uttering a word of comment. Leaning over the pots of violets for the purpose, he imagined, of composing her feelings which had been roused by the story, her fingers busied themselves among the leaves, gathering the blossoms. She tied the flowers together with a blade of grass, after the manner of the native gardeners, and presented them to Owen.

"There, *mon cher* ; take them with my love. Violets like those do not grow in Cuddalore."

The colour deepened in his cheek ; her mode of address was so strange. He looked for self-consciousness ; but there was none.

"Where did you learn French ?" he asked.

"At Pondicherry, of course. Didn't my aunt tell you that she sent me to school there for several years. Dear, sweet old nuns ! They were old-world ladies of France, and they did their best to Europeanize me. But it was impossible to complete their task. They have a saying, these Roman Catholics—'Give me the child for the first seven years. You may do what you like with it afterwards ; it is mine for life.' Yet, knowing how my first seven years were spent, they tried to make a Frenchwoman

of me, the dear foolish people! Me! When the gipsies had nourished me for nearly eight years in the heart of their tribe!"

"Have you seen the French ladies since you left school?" he asked, wondering if by any chance they had been the attraction that drew her from Mrs. Myrtle.

"No, no," she cried quickly. "I was not of their religion, and I resisted all their efforts to bring me into the fold. Their religion was too full of restrictions for a child of the open air like me."

She was gone again, and he caught sight of her white draperies amongst the roses. A child of the open air she indeed seemed to be to the tip of her fingers. She whistled and called, and in answer there was a fluttering of wings in the mango leaves. A small flock of green parrots, chattering and screaming with excitement, circled round her, and fought greedily for the morsels of rich cake that she cast towards them.

"Where are you staying?" she asked, returning once more to his side.

"At the West End Hotel."

"I shall come and see you there. I think that you are going to be very kind and good to me, but"—she flashed a challenge at him from her dark eyes—"I am not going to be good myself. I mean to do as I like—yes, just as I like, *mon cher*."

He fell into her mood, and replied, with a laugh—

“Take care, *chérie* ; I am stronger than you, and you will have to do as I wish.”

Chérie, chérie !” she murmured to herself. “It is many years since any one has called me that. Ah ! If I could only hear it from some one I know !” She sighed and was silent.

“So there is a some one ?” he asked, after a pause, during which he studied the changing expressions of her features. “A some one who was more attractive than Mrs. Myrtle ?”

For answer she turned to a writing-table and took up a bundle of papers, her manner again undergoing a transformation.

“Now, Mr. Davenport, please explain to me all about this money. It is time that I was put into possession of my own. I have been of age for some months past.”

Owen fitted in with her humour, as he would have done with that of a wilful child, and there ensued fully twenty minutes of the most business-like conversation. He found that she understood her position, and was aware of many facts in connection with the possession of property, which could only have been gained from some one with a knowledge of the law of inheritance. At the end of their talk, she said—

“Any papers that need my signature must be sent out here. I shall open an account with

the bank of Madras, which has a branch in Bangalore, and papers addressed to the bank will be quite safe."

"But, Miss Tregethin, you will not need to open an account here. You are coming to England with me, are you not, to see your aunt?"

"*Ciel!* No!" she cried, emphasizing the words by bringing her small hand down upon the papers with force. "Do not deceive yourself. I refuse point-blank to leave India."

Owen stared at her with concern and astonishment.

"What am I to say to your aunt? I promised faithfully that I would bring you back with me. Why can't you come? If it is true that you are not married, surely there are no other ties so strong that they cannot be broken?"

"The ties that bound me to India when my aunt left bind me still. I might break them if I wished to do so. But I will not break them, and it is useless to plead with me. No; you shall not speak. Go away, Mr. Davenport, before I get angry with you and scratch out your eyes. You are *mon cher* no longer. Go back to the hotel."

He was dumb before the storm, and in another moment she was gone. He waited patiently for some time, and called her more than once. He even ventured to penetrate into the room beyond the drawing-room in search of her. It was fitted as a dining-room, small, but complete in every

detail. He dared to explore the back verandah, hoping to find a servant to carry a message of conciliation to the petulant mistress of the house.

But the place was once more enveloped in silence. The parrakeets screamed in the mango trees, and the crows cawed on the roof of the kitchen. Sparrows hopped fearlessly over the matting of the verandah, and a striped grey squirrel shrieked, with bushy tail erect, from the balustrade. There was nothing to be done but to retire as he came. Halfway down the path he stopped and looked back at the bungalow, hoping to catch a glimpse of her skirts. He saw nothing, through the vista of pomegranate blossom and glossy foliage, but the deserted house, embowered in trees, brooding in dainty seclusion under the brilliant Indian sun, a strange spot of luxurious civilization on the edge of the wild landscape of the Mysore plateau.

As he mounted the broad verandah steps of the West End Hotel, a lady rose from a low cane chair, and advanced to meet him with hand outstretched. It was Marion Hensley. He gazed at her in blank astonishment. Already the cool air had restored her colour. Just now there were other reasons besides the invigorating breezes of Bangalore for its appearance in her cheek. Her eyes shone with a glad welcome which she strove in vain to hide. Her lips, more easily controlled, spoke with discretion.

"You are surprised to see me, Mr. Davenport? Yet you knew that I was in Bangalore."

"I understood that you were the guest of Colonel and Mrs. Stratton."

"So I am ; they have taken rooms here, as his appointment is only for six months."

By this time Owen had recovered his equilibrium, and though the blood raced impetuously through his veins, as he realized that Fate had thrown them together again—this time under one roof—he was master of himself once more.

"Did you know that I was coming to Bangalore?" he asked.

"Rex told me so in his last letter ; he said that you were going to the Cubbon Hotel." She looked at him with a query in her eyes.

"They had no room for me there," he answered quickly. "The place is chock-a-block with people who are here on business or pleasure. I am not surprised, for it is an ideal climate, violets and roses everywhere." His gaze was upon the roses in her cheeks, and not upon those of the garden.

"You have come at the bidding of Miss Tregethin, I understand from Rex," said Marion, as they seated themselves in a shaded nook in the verandah.

"Yes, or I should not have ventured to follow——" He broke off and resolutely avoided her eye, examining a bed of flaming

Brazilian lilies, that seemed to be rejoicing in a sun-bath in the garden.

"Do tell me about her," said Miss Hensley, hastily. "Have you seen the mysterious lady?"

He took up the topic of the heiress with eagerness. There was comparative safety in any subject that was not personal.

"Yes, I have just returned from paying my first call."

Then followed the feminine query, "What is she like? Is she pretty?"

His critical glance swept over the form and features of his companion.

"Most men would call her so—a pretty brunette, with deep brown eyes and a foreign manner. She is a strange little creature——" He stopped abruptly and smiled as he recalled the manner in which Miss Tregethin had addressed him, and he involuntarily looked down at the violets in his button-hole.

"In what way?" asked Marion, regarding him curiously.

"She is so irresponsible and unconventional, speaking out her mind in a way that is embarrassing and yet charming."

"Was she at all shy?"

"Not in the least. There is a certain shrewdness about her where business matters are concerned that contrasts strongly with her unrestrained manner. She was educated in Pondicherry, and

the wild uprearing among the gipsies is oddly veneered with French polish."

The colour came and went as Marion listened to his description. He was telling her more about the heiress than he knew himself.

"Did Miss Tregethin explain the mystery about the letters, and say how she had managed to receive them? One, we know, is still lying at the head-constable's house, where you addressed it, and yet you have had a reply to it."

His eyes met hers in amused self-reproach. "How stupid of me! I forgot to ask," he replied.

"Tell me about the house where you found her. Whose was it? Hers?"

"I don't know," he answered; and he proceeded to give an account of his visit, and the surroundings of the heiress.

"What means of subsistence has she? It is evident that she has some. A house such as you describe, though inexpensive, will not keep itself; nor are her clothes, however simple, to be had for nothing."

"She has no means of subsistence that I am aware of. But she seems anxious to have a banking account of her own, as soon as it can be managed."

"You had not the curiosity to ask how she had supported herself since she withdrew from her aunt's protection? Or whether it was her

own house? Or if she had any friends?" She scanned his features with feminine curiosity. What had there been about this unknown girl to cause such oblivion of purpose? She caught her breath in a little sigh as she waited for his reply. It was halting and embarrassed, and she misunderstood the reason of his embarrassment.

"The fact of the matter is that she would not answer a single question, except one, and that I did not actually ask. She volunteered the information that she was not married when she saw me look at her fingers."

Marion watched a busy little honey-sucker that dipped its slender bill into the flowers of the stately tuberose lily. Then she turned and looked at her companion.

"The catechizing has been apparently on her side. I gather that Miss Tregethin is charming, mysterious, attractive, in addition to being rich."

Owen sat up in the easy-chair and leaned towards Marion.

"Miss Hensley, how do you guess all that?" he asked, with wonder at her intuition.

She broke into a laugh that was slightly forced. "It is plain that Miss Tregethin is one too many for Mr. Davenport. I think that you had better enlist me in your service. Let me see her, and I will undertake to find out more in half an hour than you can discover in a week."

"Will you help me?" he rejoined eagerly.

"She is coming here to call upon me, she says ; so you will soon have an opportunity of fulfilling your promise."

"Did you explain your mission to her, and ask if she was willing to go home to her aunt ? Or did her charms drive that out of your head as well as the rest of your questions ?"

"No ; I remembered that, and made my request. But she refused ; and to strengthen her refusal she brought her pretty little hand down upon the table with such a bang as made me jump."

Marion regarded him in silence from her cushions. The luncheon-bell rang, and she rose.

"I see one thing clearly," she said with deliberation.

"What is that ?" he asked, looking up into her face.

"You will have to fulfil your promise to Mrs. Myrtle in its entirety ; yes, in its entirety."

She passed into the large drawing-room through one of the French windows that opened upon the verandah. Davenport stood looking after her until she had disappeared behind the curtains.

"I wonder if she is right," he muttered, as he strode off to his own room.

CHAPTER XIII

AN hour before sunset, Owen, stick in hand, started out for a walk, tempted by the cool air and the sight of the fresh green grass. He found his way into the Cubbon Park and wandered amongst the weeping pepper trees. The band was playing on the terrace in front of the Secretariat, and a mixed crowd of Europeans, Eurasians, and natives gathered to listen to its strains. He knew no one there—Marion had gone to a garden-party—and he did not trouble himself to examine the crowd of strange faces. As he followed one of the well-kept carriage-drives the rapid trot of a pony approached from behind. A lady, driving a white pegu in a smart little two-wheeled cart, drew up by his side.

“Get into my cart and I will take you for a drive, Mr. Davenport,” said the voice of Dilys Tregethin. She flung aside the carriage-rug whilst the small groom ran to the pony’s head. Owen hesitated, and she tapped the blue-cloth cushion of the empty seat impatiently. “Come along. Why do you hesitate? You know no

one here—except, perhaps, Miss Hensley. You will enjoy a drive; it is such a lovely evening.”

There was the same irresistible fascination about her imperious speech which he had felt in the morning. Unable to do anything but smile and indulge her fancy, he stepped into the cart, and seated himself by her side.

“It is very kind of you,” he said conventionally.

She laughed in his face. “That is what you say in England, I suppose. I asked you to come for a drive because I wished to talk to you. You frightened me away this morning sooner than I intended. This evening, if you say anything disagreeable, I will upset you.”

“Oh, please be careful,” he cried, in pretended fear, which amused but did not deceive his companion.

Away the pony flew, the rubber-tired wheels rolling noiselessly along the smooth roads. They passed beneath avenues of trees, by tanks and wayside temples, houses of Europeans, market-gardens, and finally through the gates of the Lal Bagh, the beautiful botanical gardens of the Rajah of Mysore.

And now the panting little pegu pony was content to walk, whilst Owen gazed right and left at the cultivated tropical vegetation, that needed no glass and no artificial heat to bring its rare beauties of foliage and petal to perfection.

Huge velvet-green anthuriums were grouped with red, green, and gold crotons beneath strange Australian pines. Ferns and palms clustered at the feet of African giants. The rattan and vanilla bean festooned the long arms of Indian forest trees. Whichever way the eye turned there was luxuriant growth, cultivation without rankness, nature in a wealth of profusion, yet restrained and kept within bounds. Here and there were open spaces of grass, where the sambur and spotted deer lived as happily as if they were within their own wild forests. Whilst Owen gazed about him, his companion talked, fluttering with butterfly flight from one topic to another. She told him the names of the trees and plants, and related the history of the wild animals caged in the gardens.

"You mentioned the name of Miss Hensley just now," he said presently. "Do you know her?"

"Does she know me?" she asked, replying to his question with another. He was beginning to recognize it as one of her many characteristics.

"She knows you by name. Where have you seen her?"

She ignored the query, and lifted her finger to arrest his attention.

"Hark! Do you hear that cry? It is one of the hawk-owls that are kept in the aviary. You observe that there is no reply. You may

hear the bird cry in that despairing manner any evening you like to come to the Lal Bagh. There never can be any answer ; for the poor thing is a stranger and a foreigner here. It belongs to Burmah. That is how I should cry in England if you caged me there."

She looked at him with solemn awestruck eyes, after the fashion of a child that speaks of the bogie-man. It was impossible to hold her to one subject, or, with all her light chatter, to extract a single piece of information that she did not choose to give. He did not pursue the topic of her acquaintance with Miss Hensley.

Suddenly Dilys pulled the rein, and brought the pony up sharply.

"You must come and see the flowers," she said, as she stepped out of the cart.

Owen followed her to the terraces of garden beds where English plants of delicate tint grew side by side with gorgeous flowers of the tropics. They lingered amongst the blossoms ; bold swift-winged hawk-moths were already darting from one sweet to another ; then she led the way down paths that tunnelled beneath dense archways of creepers, or wound through grassy glades of cultivated jungle. Here and there a seat invited the wanderers to rest a few minutes, whilst the bulbuls and black robins sang their evensong in the branches above.

The shadows grew long and the sun sank

behind the trees. By this time Owen had lost his bearings, and would have been puzzled to find his way out of the grounds. His companion was apparently quite at home in the place, and she led him safely back to the road where they had left the pony.

At sight of his mistress the syce produced a box of matches and lighted the lamps. The brief Indian twilight was disappearing fast upon the heels of the sun, and night was not far off. Yet Dilys was in no hurry to return. She walked the pony slowly along the carriage-drive towards the entrance gates. Strange noises came from the houses of the wild animals as they awoke with the dusk from the lethargy and torpor of the sunlit hours. They had been fed, and were gorged with the flesh of goats. Their strong nervous limbs twitched and ached for a mad race over the rocky plain, or for a wild game of hide-and-seek through the jungle.

“Don’t be alarmed ; they are all safely locked behind iron bars. Do you hear the hyæna? They call it a laugh, but it sounds to me more like a sob.—That is the wolf. Poor thing! Half the night it paces up and down its cage, ever seeking a hole by which it may escape. It will continue its miserable, hopeless search, till it dies of a surfeit of meat.—That was the panther’s voice. Can’t you hear how it prays passionately to be let loose, so that it may creep like a cat

over the rocks, and climb the big limbs of the jungle trees.—Ah ! those are the monkeys. They are weeping, yes, weeping like children, because their human captors say that it is bedtime. The poor monkeys are ripe for a game of mischief and play. But no one heeds the misery of these caged creatures. It is enough that they are housed and fed.”

She shook the reins in a fit of impatience against a fate that so cruelly treated these poor creatures.

“You surely would not let them loose ?” asked Owen. “To do so would bring misfortune and disaster upon the large gang of gardeners that it must be necessary to employ to keep the grounds in such good order.”

“Who thinks of consequences in this country ? If they are considered at all, it is after they have occurred, and not before. Did the coolie gardener think of consequences ?”

“What did he do ?”

“He stole the iron bolt from the den of the big bear, and sold it for two annas in the bazaar. The bear got out and rambled through the gardens. The coolie’s wife was a grass-cutter who was employed to cut grass for the deer. She was resting under a tree when the bear came up behind and stroked her down the back with his long claws. The two annas went but a little way towards her funeral expenses, and her husband wailed loudly over his misfortune. But

even while he mourned for her, he did not realize that he himself had been the cause of her death. He put it all down to the work of an evil spirit that lived in the tree under which she sat. The devil was angry because its worship had been neglected."

"Couldn't the man be made to understand that he had committed a grave crime?"

"There was no great crime in stealing an iron bolt. It was the circumstances which occurred afterwards which made it so serious. If I let all these poor captives loose, and they escaped in safety to their jungles without doing harm to others, my wrong-doing would be trivial. But if they each attacked and killed a grass-cutter, you would say that it was murder on my part to have thrown open the doors of their cages."

They passed through the big gates, and Dilys gave the pony rein. They rolled swiftly by the fruit and flower gardens of the native market-gardeners. Fire-flies danced in the deep shadows of the palm fronds that hung over the hedges of thorn. Overhead the stars shone with a brilliance that illumined the night, and a deep red glow, like the glow of a London fire, lay low upon the western horizon. The air was cool and dewy, and the heavy scent of flowering trees hung in the air.

Owen wrapped the carriage-rug more closely

about his knees, and was conscious of a keen enjoyment of the scene and of the society of the girl. For some distance he was content to sit in silence and give himself up to the pleasure of the moment. But as they neared the hotel, he roused himself, remembering Miss Hensley's searching questions, and made another attempt to penetrate his companion's reserve.

"What a wonderful pony you have. Is it your own?"

"It is mine when I am in want of it."

The reply was accompanied by an unrestrained laugh, which he instinctively felt was levelled at himself, and defied all effort to fathom the mystery which surrounded her. However, he persevered and asked—

"Is the bungalow, where I saw you this morning, yours also?"

"We are not far from the hotel, and in less than five minutes I shall put you down at the door. Are there any other questions that you would like to ask before we stop?" she inquired mockingly.

"Yes, Miss Tregethin; one that I shall repeat as often as I see you. Will you let me take you home to your aunt?"

"'No, dear Beast.' I reply in the words of Beauty in the fairy-tale."

"Beauty gave that answer to a very different question. The Beast had asked her to marry him."

"It is a request that any other Beast may make if he is so inclined," she replied, with another laugh, and a glance of her flashing eyes that puzzled him. Was it nothing but unconventional simple fun, or was it a touch of French coquetry? Surely she could not have learnt it of the nuns. "Here is the hotel," she cried, as she swung into the gates of the compound. "I will come and see you to-morrow morning after breakfast. There is something in your brother's letter which I want you to explain. I forgot to ask you to-day."

She pulled up the pony at the verandah steps, and Owen descended from the cart.

"Good-bye, Beauty; and thank you very much for the drive," he said as he took her hand.

"Good night, dear Beast," was the reply. It was not loud, but it was clear and distinct enough to reach the ears of Miss Hensley who was lying back unseen upon the cushions of a big couch in the verandah. As the pony started forward to continue its journey to St. John's, Davenport disappeared in the direction of his own room, too much absorbed in thought to observe that the verandah was not empty.

CHAPTER XIV

OWEN DAVENPORT possessed the British dislike to taking any kind of meal in his bedroom. He therefore directed the servant to prepare his early morning tea in the verandah of the dining-room. With the first movement in the hotel he awoke, and by the time the tea, buttered toast, and fruit were ready, he was seated at the table. Other men who were staying in the hotel also appeared, bent on the same errand. Much as the early tea was appreciated, no time was lost over its consumption. The cool hours of the morning were too precious to waste in the house. Saddle-horse and dog-cart waited outside to carry each man to his destination, whether for business or for pleasure.

Davenport alone had no mount nor conveyance. His short experience of the hired carriage inclined him to dispense with wheels where it was possible, and trust to his own feet. In such a climate a walk was preferable if no appointment had to be kept. Some one else was apparently of the same opinion, for Miss Hensley met him

on the top of the verandah steps equipped for a morning stroll.

"Are you going out on business?" she asked, after the usual greeting.

"No, I am only going in search of that essential to our well-being, exercise."

"I am bent on the same errand; so, with your permission, I will come with you."

Since they were obliged to meet at every meal and might encounter each other a dozen times a day, Marion had determined to school herself back into the old friendly relations which existed at Cuddalore. She was so successful that the one episode which had threatened their good-comradeship was banished from her mind like a bad dream. Owen, himself, felt more at his ease, and resolutely closed his eyes to any danger that might attend the renewal of their friendship.

"I suppose you know that the entomologists who stayed with us at Cuddalore are at this hotel?"

"No, I was not aware that they were here. They were not at dinner last night."

"They have been put into one of the detached bungalows belonging to the hotel, where they have a private suite of rooms and plenty of space for their numerous cases."

"Are they pursuing moths and butterflies as ardently as ever?"

"I believe so; and the wonderful Henri

continues to act as their guardian angel, playing the part of courier, as well as valet, packer, general provider, and entomologist's assistant. I am sure that he alone knows what all those packing-cases contain. A natural-history museum, I should call it. I was always so thankful that the weird insects they collected were dead and pickled in spirits, and that there was no fear of finding them crawling about the rooms."

Tempted by overshadowing trees, they turned their backs upon the cantonment, and followed a road that led towards the open country. After passing the last house they had the way to themselves. The eccentricities of the Germans afforded them amusement for some time.

"By-the-by, I did not tell you that I met Miss Tregethin whilst I was walking yesterday in the Cubbon Park. She was driving a smart little turn-out, and she offered me a lift, which I accepted. We went to the Lal Bagh," said Owen, after a pause.

"The Lal Bagh!" cried Marion, with surprise.

"Yes; it is a lovely place, a tropical fairy-land of trees and flowers."

"So it is; but I am told that it has its dangers," replied Miss Hensley.

"Dilys assured me that the wild beasts were all safely caged," he said.

"The danger does not lie with the Beasts,

but rather with the Beauties of the place. It is said that the Lal Bagh is a garden of love, and that it is responsible for all the love-affairs of the station."

"Now I come to think of it, it is an ideal spot for that sort of thing," he replied, as he recalled the paths and shrubberies, the fern and palm houses, the creeper-covered walks and shaded nooks.

"A place to enjoy with a chosen companion. You found your company pleasant enough, no doubt," she remarked, looking at him as though she would read his inmost thoughts.

"Very pleasant," he replied, with simple enthusiasm. "Miss Tregethin is a delightful surprise. Besides her dainty personality, the mystery which still surrounds her is attractive."

"Did you discover anything more last evening?"

He laughed as he admitted his failure. Some one approached with rapid steps from behind, and Owen was hailed by the subject of his remarks.

"You are Miss Hensley, I am sure," cried the girl, holding out her gloved hand to Marion. "We know each other by name, and need no introduction."

Marion responded, whilst her observant eye took in the details of dress. It was not an expensive frock that Dilys wore, but it showed considerable taste and a knowledge of what was becoming, as well as fashionable. A sun-hat

shaded her face, and she carried a light walking-cane in her hand.

"I have just called at the hotel, where the servants told me that you were in this direction. I am so glad to find you together, as I wanted to see you both."

As she talked she moved along the road between them, glancing from one to the other with little smiles and flashes of her dark eyes. She chattered volubly, and her companions could only reply in monosyllables. In vain Marion tried to put a question or two. Dilys did not seem to hear anything but the sound of her own voice. From light chatter she plunged into business connected with her property, describing the technical point in the lawyer's letter which puzzled her. It was a trifling matter, but Owen took some pains to give a full explanation. When he had finished there ensued a slight pause, an opportunity which Marion hastened to seize.

"Mr. Davenport tells me that you have a charming little bungalow."

"Yes," replied Dilys, turning an observant gaze on the questioner, not unlike that of an animal doubtful of the character of another that suddenly approaches.

"And a delightful pony and cart."

There was a still fainter yes; and Owen thought that he detected a sparkle of amusement nearly allied to mischief in Miss Tregethin's eye.

"You must have had a very happy time in such an ideal home, and you will be very sorry to leave it."

It was Owen's turn to smile as he listened to Marion's gentle attempt at catechising.

"Have you had good health ever since your aunt left?"

Dilys threw up her hands in affected horror, as she cried—

"Oh, Miss Hensley, do I look ill? Oh! don't say that I look ill. I hate the very thought of being sick. If I were ill, I think that I should creep into a hole and die as quickly as I could, to get it over. Mr. Davenport, you will tell me the truth, I know, for you are my friend. Do I look ill?"

He hastened to assure her that she was the picture of health, and no sooner had he finished than she was scudding like a bird along the line of thought opened by Miss Hensley's question.

"Oh, aren't you sorry for animals when they are ill? They can't tell you what they feel. The poor things just lift their suffering eyes and say, 'Please pity me.'"

Marion felt herself whirled away from her purpose as Dilys described how various creatures behaved when in pain, especially monkeys, that were almost human in their expression of emotions of all kind. Her words indicated how intimate her relations with nature had been, and how passionately she loved all animals, whether wild or tame.

The road rose in gradual ascent to the brow of the high ground. From this point there was a fine view of the table-land and distant hills. But it was not the blue mountains on the horizon to which their attention was drawn at that moment, nor the plain with its varied wild growth and cultivation.

Fifty yards further on, the road ceased to be metalled, and was nothing but a deeply rutted sandy track. At its juncture there was a sharp rise from the track to the road, and at this point a country cart, drawn by a handsome little bull, had stuck. The driver had dismounted, and was ill-treating the animal with some of those fiendish devices, the mere mention of which makes the blood of the European run cold. He was beside himself with impotent anger, and did not notice their approach. The tortured beast was mad with pain and terror. As the party caught sight of him, Owen shouted to him in English to desist. Marion turned very pale, and uttered an exclamation. Dilys said nothing, but darted forward, and seizing the coolie by the arm, forced him away from his victim, whilst a torrent of words poured from her lips. The bull, by a twist of its neck, released itself from the yoke, and fell panting by the side of the cart. Tears streamed down the cheeks of the man as Dilys shook the arm she held, and loaded him with reproaches in his mother tongue. His ungovernable rage melted

like snow before the fire of her indignation, and he was filled with self-pity and helpless despair.

"How dare you hurt that creature? See! You have killed it, and it is of Brahma's breed. The curses of the gods will rest upon you and your family to the tenth generation."

"Ayoh! It was in an evil hour that I started this morning. No sooner did I leave, than a widow crossed my path, Ayoh! Ayoh!" and his shoulders shook with real sobs.

"Why do you try to force the bull to do what is impossible? Shall I chain you to yonder droog and torture you till you draw it away from its foundations?"

"What could I do? The master said, 'Take the bull, and deliver the sacks in the market by seven o'clock. If you fail I will fine you.' The bull would not draw the cart; and what could I do? It is nearly seven now, and my master will surely fine me, though I am only a poor man."

Marion and Owen looked on in some surprise, not comprehending what was passing between Dilys and the driver. Tears of pity stood in Miss Hensley's eyes as they fell on the prostrate animal.

"Oh, cruel, brutal man! Can't we find a policeman? Mr. Davenport, we ought to give him in charge of the police."

"Yes, I really think that the man ought to be

punished. Miss Tregethin, shall I go back to the cantonment and fetch a policeman?"

The coolie did not understand English, but the word police arrested his attention. He wiped his tear-besmirched face with a corner of his loincloth, and fixed his eyes anxiously upon Dilys. She read what was in them.

"No, don't do that; just wait till I have talked to the man again. He certainly ought to be punished; but I should be sorry to bring misfortune upon the family which is depending upon him. These people live from hand to mouth, and one must not make the burden too heavy for them any more than for the bullocks."

Again she talked to the coolie, and the word "polliss" occurred. The man showed signs of fear as he listened. Putting his hands together, he touched his forehead, the picture of abject misery, and seemed to be making a request. The face of Miss Tregethin softened, as it might in speaking to a naughty child. Then, to the astonishment of her companions, she pointed to her walking-cane which she had thrown upon the ground. The man picked it up and presented it to her. She asked him a question, to which he replied by an affirmative wag of the head. Kneeling in front of her as she raised the cane, he received a shower of blows across his bare shoulders without a murmur, flinching a little, as the young arm was not too light.

"There!" she cried. "He has been punished, and there is no need to send for the police. Now we must give him some assistance. He has been sent out with a load that might have been right for a level road, but it was too heavy for a hill. The bull is young and difficult to manage, and he is helpless single-handed."

She examined the cart, which was tilted downwards, with its shafts resting on the ground.

"It is shamefully loaded and equally ill-balanced. Some of the sacks must be taken out," she said.

Assisted by Owen, the coolie lifted the sacks on to his head and carried them to the brow of the hill. Then Dilys turned her attention to the animal, which was recovering itself. She gave her gloves and stick to Marion, who stood aside an interested spectator. With gentle pressure she passed her hand over the creature's head and neck, and stroked its ears. Its ribs, though badly bruised, were not broken. The bull appeared to recognize a soothing touch; the wildness faded from its eyes, and its confidence returned. She loosened the ropes that linked it to the yoke, and lifting its head, persuaded it to rise. The trembling creature made no attempt to get away, but stood before her with its head bent, whilst she continued to talk to it and stroke its ears. Marion was convinced that it not only understood the sympathy offered, but was soothed and consoled.

It drew deep sighs of enjoyment as the lithe fingers massaged and stroked. By this time the cart had been relieved of part of its load. Dilys led the bull to the yoke, whilst Owen and the driver lifted the shafts.

"Now put your shoulder to one wheel, Mr. Davenport. The coolie will go to the other," she said, as the yoke was gently lowered on to the neck.

She held the nose rope, and with strange, wild shouts, learnt of the gipsies long ago, she urged the animal into motion. The cart was drawn as if by magic out of the ruts and over the obstructing rise in the road. With the assistance of Owen and the man, it rolled easily on towards the crest of the hill. From there the road descended in a gentle incline all the way to the market, and there was no fear of further trouble between man and beast. The sacks carried up were readjusted on the cart, so that the yoke neither weighted the bull nor half strangled it by the confining rope. The coolie looked anxiously at Owen and Marion.

"Will the English master and mistress tell the polliss?" he asked.

"No, brother, do not fear. Have I not punished you myself at your desire that they may be satisfied? Go on your way; you will be in the market only a few minutes behind your time."

"Ah! Ranee of the gipsies! you are always good to the poor."

“And I am good to the bulls of Brahma.” She lifted her hand with warning. “Never treat a bull again as you treated this. If you do, you shall walk beneath dhoby bundles as a dhoby donkey in your next life. I say it because I know it.”

She spoke like a prophetess with faith in her own words, which faith she communicated to the man, and he shuddered. Without a sound he fell at her feet and touched them with his forehead—a not unusual act of worship performed by an inferior to a superior. She placed her hand upon his head, and said gently—

“Rise, brother, and go on your way; the market man waits.”

He obeyed, and, salaaming to Owen and Marion, seated himself on the shaft. The bull, in whose nature lay a strain of bovine obstinacy, was not inclined to start. Dilys passed her fingers along its spine with a secret pressure in the tips, exhorting the animal in the wild tongue she had used to make it rise. The bull snorted, shook its head, and dashed away at a pace which threatened to overturn the creaking, swaying cart.

It was a curious scene, and neither Owen nor Marion spoke. Participation in an act of mercy will draw human beings unconsciously together, and this ministration to man and beast forged the first link of friendship between Dilys and Miss Hensley. The latter had not actively assisted, but she had given her whole sympathy.

It was to Marion that Dilys addressed herself now, as her reserved nature suddenly expanded under the warmth of that sympathy.

“I love animals of all kinds, but the dear little bull is the one I love best. You know the gipsies have herds of them. They are used for transport. My earliest days were spent riding upon the bulls, or running amongst the herd. The gipsies talked to the bullocks in a curious language, which they said was mardoo-tongue. Before starting on a long and troublesome journey, they told their cattle that the way was long, and asked pardon beforehand for the use of the goad. It was necessary to use it, or we should never have passed over the steep ghats. But, to make up for it, they promised the animals plenty of corn and grass, if they did their work well and travelled quickly. They listened and drew deep sighs, which showed that they comprehended all that was said. When the weaker beasts lagged behind, the Lumbadees took me back with them. The tired creatures followed my little white bull without the need of goad or stick. The men taught me to shout as you heard just now. It is the call they give when they reach the camping-ground, and the bulls know that it means food, water, and rest. When they hear it on the road, they understand that the camp is not far off. Sometimes, when it was only a short distance, I used to go by myself and bring them in unassisted.

I had only to call, and they followed me like sheep. I had a tiny white bullock for my own. It was too small to carry a heavy load, so the big father of the tribe gave it to me, and I rode upon its back whenever the tribe travelled."

"Did the gipsies set their bullocks to do tasks which were too great?" asked Owen, deeply interested in her strange reminiscences.

"Never!" she cried, with a fleeting spark of anger. "That is only what stupid men like that coolie's employer do. When the loads were heavy and the bulls flagged, they eased them of their burdens, and we all rested under the shade of some big rock or forest tree. Then we loaded up again and went on. Ah! those were happy days when my little white bull carried me over the hills, where the flowers were even more beautiful than they are in the Lal Bagh. We marched through forests carpeted with ferns. The orchids trailed their blossoms above our heads, and the moss hung in a fringe from the thick branches of the trees. Sometimes we climbed down the steep paths of the mountains, and waded through streams that tumbled over the rocks and roared like wild beasts. Those were the times when I used to catch a glimpse of the sea. At first it seemed like a streak of blue on the sky. I never could understand why it came out of the sky as we climbed down the mountain. It seemed to my childish fancy that

it wanted to meet us, but lost its way behind the trees of the plain as soon as it had come out of the sky. I had curious fancies in those days about everything. Sometimes the forest trees were full of monkeys. I watched them with amusement, mingled with awe. I believed that they were envious of me, and coveted my white bull. I used to lean forward and promise in his long white ear that I would never, never let the wicked wanderoo monkeys have him, for I loved him better than all else in the world, except one person. I wonder if he understood what I said?"

Her face softened, and the dark eyes shone as she recalled the scenes of her childhood. Owen watched her as a man gazes at a fascinating picture, content to enjoy what the picture showed without probing further. Had Marion maintained her sympathetic attitude, the spell of the moment might have brought forth more treasures. But Miss Hensley's curiosity increased as she listened, until she was dominated by the desire to know, at all costs, more of the history of this strange girl who held Owen entranced.

"Have you been living with the gipsies since Mrs. Myrtle went home?" she asked.

The query brought a sudden silence, as the sound of a gun will silence a song-bird. Whilst Dilys had talked, they had followed a bend of the road that led them back to the other side of the hotel. Now she halted abruptly.

"I must be going home. Good-bye, Miss Hensley. Mr. Davenport, you will come and see me again before long, I hope?"

"With pleasure, and if you will allow me I will walk part of the way home with you now. Miss Hensley will not mind going to the hotel by herself, as we are so near, I am sure." He looked at Marion, who hastened to say, in a somewhat conventional manner, that she would finish the walk alone.

"This is kind of you. I shall be delighted to have company on the road, as my house is some distance from here."

She glanced into his eyes, and there was an inflection in her voice which did not escape Marion's ear. The phantom of a chill went through her soul, as, a few minutes later, she turned and watched their retreating figures. It was not difficult to divine from his attitude that he was once more under the spell of his companion's tongue. At the same moment Dilys gave a swift and almost imperceptible glance over her shoulder. A smile curved her lips as she caught sight of Miss Hensley standing motionless beneath the shadow of a tree; it was a smile of mischievous fun. A little later she dismissed Davenport. When he retraced his steps there was no sign of Miss Hensley, nor did he see her again until they met at the *table d'hôte* in the evening.

CHAPTER XV

A FORTNIGHT passed pleasantly enough, and the time approached for Marion to return to her father. Owen had been living in the present without much thought of the future. Not a day went by that he did not meet Dilys. As for Miss Hensley he encountered her constantly in the hotel. Sometimes he found his way to the little retreat embowered among the trees on the edge of the plateau ; at other moments he was seated by Miss Tregethin's side behind the swift pегu pony. At sunrise Miss Hensley usually met him on the verandah without making any actual appointment, and they explored the Cubbon Park, the golf ground and the busy cantonment so full of military life. Their conversation was entirely upon impersonal subjects, and their attitude strictly of a friendly nature.

But though they seemed to be at ease, one of the two was dimly conscious that the path pursued was running along the verge of a precipice. In her innermost heart Marion was aware that the renewed intimacy was unwise as far as her own

peace of mind was concerned. Whether it affected her companion or not she was unable to decide. His attention was divided between herself and the heiress in a manner that perplexed her not a little. Yet she was inwardly convinced that the transference of his affections from herself to Dilys would be the best solution of the difficulty. Her heart ached with complex feelings, and she felt that the present state of affairs must be brought to an end.

In view of forwarding matters, she plucked up sufficient courage to touch upon the one topic which they tacitly avoided, her own future and Owen's plans. Nervous and ill at ease, she made a sudden plunge one evening after dinner when they chanced to find themselves together in the drawing-room verandah.

"You are not playing billiards, this evening, Mr. Davenport."

"No, the room is crowded. There is an influx of the planter element from Mysore. It is delightful to see the zest with which they take up their cues as if they had not seen a table for years. I haven't the heart to stand in their way."

"It is a beautiful night, though the air is cool. Come out into the garden for a stroll."

Without waiting for a reply she moved down the steps, and he followed silently. As a rule she never courted a *tête-à-tête* after dinner, but remained with Mrs. Stratton. They kept to the carriage-drive, which took a wide sweep round a

group of garden beds. He was content to walk in silence by her side, enjoying the mere consciousness of her presence.

"How are you getting on with Miss Tregethin?" she asked with abruptness. "I have seen you out driving together more than once."

"Every evening, you might say, without being far wrong," he replied. There was no sign of embarrassment or self-consciousness in his tone, and he continued easily, "She has shown me the old fort and native town. We have seen the dungeon where Sir David Baird was imprisoned until he escaped in the water-skin of a friendly water-carrier. We have peeped into the Rajah's warehouses filled with sandal-wood, and have wandered over Tippoo Saib's palace. Dilys did not forget to point out the shelf daïs upon which the tyrant sat as his prisoners received their fearful punishment of death beneath the feet of his elephants. He looked on, it is said, and gloated over their agonies. Well, indeed, was he called the Tiger!"

"Have you been to the Lal Bagh again?" she asked, glancing at him sharply in the starlight.

"Yes, more than once."

"And is the tradition being fulfilled? Is the garden weaving its spells over you both? or is Miss Tregethin listening more amiably to your proposals to take her home unattached?"

"She steadily refuses to go."

“Have you pressed the matter ? ”

“I have pleaded until the child lost her temper completely, and said the rudest things imaginable. Afterwards she was so penitent, the little witch ! I was quite unable to preserve my offended dignity, and I had to forgive her impertinences absolutely.

“Is it any use to try again ? ”

“Not a bit. She threatened to box my ears if I mentioned the subject again. And, by George ! I believe the young minx will carry out her threat if I say another word.”

Miss Hensley laughed ; but it was as well that the night hid the trouble that lay in her eyes.

“You are here to draw her to her aunt, and you must set about your task without further delay,” she said, with decision. Owen did not reply, and she continued, “Have you tried the other alternative ? ” He understood what she meant, but made no reply. She read his silence aright, and continued, “Have you heard lately how Mrs. Myrtle is ? ”

“My brother says that she remains much the same. He tells me to put pressure upon Dilys—but it is useless.”

“Is Mrs. Myrtle much attached to her niece ? ” asked Marion.

“I don’t think that it can be compared with a mother’s love. She was undoubtedly piqued by the strange behaviour of Dilys, and now that she

is ill, she has the craving of an invalid for the fulfilment of her desire."

"Which fulfilment you undertook voluntarily; and you are bound to carry out what you promised, however unreasonable both the ladies may seem."

Miss Hensley spoke with rapid eagerness. Davenport stopped short in his walk.

"What do you want me to do?" he demanded, in a low voice.

"You must ask her to be your wife."

"Marion!"

The word as well as the tone sent a sudden thrill through her heart. In vain she tried to control its throbbing, and to drill herself into the even placidity which should mark mere friendship.

"It would be best for us both," she replied, in a voice that trembled slightly.

He laughed derisively. "Do you remember that scene in the road, when our little friend thrashed that big cartman? That is exactly how she would treat me, if I dared to ask her to marry me."

"You are surely not in bodily fear of Miss Tregethin?"

"One doesn't like to be scratched by a kitten, however harmless it may be."

They resumed their stroll along the carriage-drive, and Marion was silent for a while. She seemed to have arrived at a dead-lock, as far as

Dilys and her affairs were concerned. There yet remained the subject of herself to speak about, and presently she said—

“Would you like to hear what I have done?”

His mind was still upon the wilful heiress. He turned and looked at his companion with apprehension, as he replied—

“You haven’t broached the matter to Dilys, have you?”

“No ; it concerns myself. I have written to Rex, proposing that we should be married at Christmas, and go home on leave when father retires in March.”

“Has Rex replied?”

“Not yet ; I only wrote this morning.”

Owen made no comment, and they moved on in silence towards the house. From the native infantry lines came the sound of the last bugle, and it was faintly echoed in the European barracks further off.

“That was what I wanted to tell you about myself,” said Marion, as she stopped beneath the portico. Davenport would not trust himself to speak. The advice she had given, followed by the news of her own approaching wedding, was a hint that the fool’s paradise in which he had been living must come to an end. She moved towards the steps, and he made no effort to detain her. Halfway up she turned. “By-the-by, I shall be leaving Bangalore in a day or two. I have not

heard from father for the last few days. He is still in camp ; but as soon as he returns, I must go back to him."

Without waiting for his reply, she resumed her way to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Stratton was sitting. Davenport watched her for a few moments, and then sought the smoking-room, where he remained until it was time to retire.

At ten o'clock the next morning, Owen presented himself at the little bungalow in the St. John's district. Dilys was fluttering about the house and the verandahs like a restless bird on the wing. She caught sight of the carriage that brought him as far as the entrance of the compound. There might have been room on the narrow drive for a vehicle, and it was possible, also, that a carriage might have drawn up beneath the miniature portico that sheltered the steps of the verandah. But callers at these small bungalows preferred not to make the attempt, whilst their Jehus refused outright to negotiate such narrow ways. Before he reached the bungalow, she met him with the gladness of a child who greets a playfellow.

"I have just finished feeding all my pets, tame and wild. I have not forgotten the squirrels, nor even the greedy cows."

"Nor the parrots?" asked Owen, smiling, although he gave the subject but half his attention.

"They have had a feast of custard-apples.

They fought and quarrelled shamefully ; but how they enjoyed it !—the squabbling, I mean, as well as the fruit. The natives of India are very like the parrots. They don't go to the seaside as you English do. They have a grand village quarrel instead. The women begin, and for some days they keep to scolding and abuse. Then comes the scratching and screaming and tearing of hair. After that, the men are drawn into it, and sticks are used, but no bones are broken. There are only a good many sore backs. And when it is all over, they feel refreshed, and settle down to the dull round of village life contentedly for another period."

While she chattered thus her quick eyes surveyed him from under their dark lashes. With one of the strange instincts imbibed from the gipsies in her childhood, she divined that his mind was occupied, and she made a shrewd guess that it was something connected with herself. Was it that oft-repeated request to go to England to see the aunt who had caused her foster-mother to desert her, and who had sent her to school when her whole soul was longing for the free open-air life of the Lumbadee's calling ? The colour mounted to her cheek, and a dangerous sparkle shone in her eye, as she pictured the cold, sunless country of her parents with the exaggeration of hearsay and tradition. If her aunt wished to see her, let her get well and come out

to India. Go to England in the dreary winter she would not! The little foot came down upon the ground with a stamp that startled her companion and brought him out of his abstraction.

"Hallo! little one. Somebody has been rubbing it up the wrong way! What has gone wrong?"

"Nothing has gone wrong yet," she contradicted with a pout. "I am only saying no! no! no! no! to what you are going to ask me. I won't! I won't! I won't!" and down came the foot again with each negation.

"How do you know that I am going to ask you a question?" he replied in some surprise.

"I can see a question hanging on your lips, and the answer is 'No,'" she cried with vehemence.

"You don't know what I am going to ask, you little witch!"

He was watching her now with his undivided attention. She was in one of her most fascinating moods, though she was not aware of it.

"Yes, I do; I know just as well as if you had spoken it. It is all over your face. Though you ask me fifty times fifty, the answer is 'No'!"

Was she sharp enough to guess all that was in his mind? It was quite possible, and his proposal would evoke as flat a refusal as she had given to his other request. He smiled again as he said—

"Hadn't you better wait until I put the

question before giving a reply? Ladies don't generally 'go over the bridge before they get there' in these matters. They usually wait till the gentleman speaks."

She glanced at him with swift inquiry. His words puzzled her slightly. One of the sudden changes which were characteristic came over her. The eyes were lowered, the hands folded, and Dilys stood before him the personification of gentleness and humility.

"I am waiting," she said meekly.

Was she making fun of him? or was this another of her transient moods never before exhibited? He gazed at her in doubt.

"Yes? What do you wish to ask me, Mr. Davenport? Please, I am quite ready, waiting at the foot of the bridge. Will you not cross it?"

"Dilys, do be serious a moment," he cried. "You make it so difficult for me to say what I want you to hear."

"Do I?" she said penitently. "I am so sorry. Indeed, I am all seriousness. Tell me, and I will listen."

He rose from the seat and took a few steps up and down the small drawing-room, whilst the girl watched him from beneath her lashes, standing like a child on its best behaviour in front of the chair which he had just vacated.

"I want to—to—confess something and then ask you a very serious question."

She made no sign of surprise nor even of curiosity. He ceased moving about the room and came to her side. Her head drooped a little lower over the folded hands as he began his tale.

“When I left England, we all thought that Mrs. Myrtle was on her death-bed. Her desire to see you was intense, and it seemed to be the craving of a dying woman. In my pity for her distress, I rashly promised to bring you back at all cost. If every other means failed, I promised——”

He paused; the tale seemed so foolish in the telling. She afforded him no help, and the head was so low that he could not see her features.

“To be honest, I promised Mrs. Myrtle that I would ask you to be my wife, and as such I would bring you to her.”

There was a faint little “Yes” as he concluded, which indicated that she had heard what he was saying; but beyond this he received neither encouragement nor reproof.

“Dilys, will you marry me?”

His eyes rested upon her with grave anxiety during the silence that ensued. Slowly she raised hers to his and met their earnest gaze with something of his own gravity. The fun and mischief, the petulance and breezy anger had entirely disappeared, and the child was merged into the woman. He had become accustomed to her way of answering one question with another, a trick

learned of the tribe that fostered her ; but he was taken by surprise when she said—

“Does Miss Hensley know that you have come here this morning to ask me to be your wife?”

“Yes—that is, I believe she does, though I did not see her before I started.”

“Did she send you?” Her eyes were still fixed upon his as though she sought the truth in their depths.

He was embarrassed by her catechising, and replied, with some hesitation—

“I—to be honest, perhaps she did.”

Her glance was lowered ; she had learnt all that she wanted to know. A faint flicker of a smile hovered round the corners of her mouth as she again bent in silence over her hands. He could not see the shadowy fleeting smile that came again as she listened.

“Well,” he cried expectantly, “it is time now to cross your bridge. The question has been asked, and you are at liberty to say ‘No.’ Fifty times fifty, no ! ”

But the refusal did not come, and he watched in vain for the flush of swift annoyance, the flashing eye, and the “No ! no ! no ! ” of ten minutes ago. His heart beat violently as he waited to learn if he stood released or bound.

“What is your answer, Dilys ? Will you marry me ? ” he asked, trying to suppress the

impatience which echoed in every word that he uttered.

Suddenly she lifted her head. Her eyes shone with a strange light as they met his.

"Yes, dear Beast, yes," she said, with unfaltering decision.

Her words held him speechless and still, as their true import was borne in upon his mind. For the moment he seemed paralyzed by the turn of events. Dilys, on the contrary, was self-contained and in no way disturbed by the new situation. She took his hand and pressed the back of it to her forehead; yet another of the quaint tricks acquired from her foster-mother's people.

"Thus do gipsy brides greet their bridegrooms, dear Beast," she cried.

In another moment she was gone, and he was alone. The hot blood coursed in his veins as he stood there, the affianced husband of the strange, wild girl who attracted him, charmed him, wove spells about him, but failed to touch his heart.

"Shall I ever learn to love her?" he asked himself, as he passed down the familiar path towards the carriage that awaited him in the road. "If I ever do, it will be with no ordinary love, for she is no ordinary girl," was the answer he made to his own query as he stepped into the brougham and was driven back to the hotel.

CHAPTER XVI

As Marion entered the dining-room of the hotel for lunch, she glanced round in search of Owen. He was not there, nor did he appear at the informal afternoon tea served in the verandah at four o'clock. The visitors at the hotel grouped themselves into parties as they pleased, and the tea was arranged on small bamboo tables accordingly. It had been Owen's custom to join Mrs. Stratton's table, but she never waited for him. As soon as tea was over, she and Miss Hensley departed for the usual drive.

Davenport had had lunch in his own room, and all the afternoon he had been busy with his English mail letters, which had to be posted that evening. As soon as these were finished he walked to the post-office and despatched a wire to his brother. By the time he had returned to the hotel, the informal gathering in the verandah had dispersed, and he drank his cup of tea by himself.

Taking his stick, he set out for the usual stroll in the Cubbon Park, and hung about the spot where Dilys was wont to pick him up. This

evening there was no sign of the fast little Pegu pony. He lingered near the band-stand, and wandered about the park until the sun dipped behind the trees and the rapidly approaching Indian twilight enveloped the landscape. In the east a bank of heavy cloud lay on the horizon. Threads of pale trembling lightning intersected the masses of vapour and played about their rounded heads, which were crowned with rosy light from the setting sun.

The verandah where the ladies sat after dinner was forsaken that evening. A cold wet wind, carrying splashes of rain on its wings, drove the gay crowd into the drawing-room. It was a cheerful room, large and airy, and bright with many lamps.

Owen caught sight of Marion seated upon a couch. She was not engaged in conversation at the moment, and the seat beside her was vacant. Crossing the room, he dropped into the opposite corner of the lounge. Since she had come to Bangalore she seemed to have undergone a change. That buoyancy of spirits which had enabled her to meet the little worries of life with a laugh and a joke had given place to an unusual gentleness that bordered on sadness. Owen recognized the change, and his heart beat as he thought of its possible cause. But he put the subject aside resolutely. Subtle treachery towards his friend was carried in its train. He

shut his eyes to the danger that beset them both, and comforted himself with the thought that he was doing his best to protect himself and Marion from the consequences of the unguarded friendship into which they had unconsciously drifted.

"This is the first time we have met to-day," he remarked, unable to repress the contentment he felt.

"I was too busy this morning to come out for a walk. You were not at lunch nor at tea, and I wondered if you had gone out to Hebbal to see the firing." She raised her eyebrows slightly, as though she asked for a reason for his absence.

"I am going to Hebbal to-morrow. Captain Beaumont has offered me a seat in his brake. To-day, I have been busy with my English letters. I wrote a long one to my brother, and sent him a wire in addition," he explained.

"A wire?" repeated Miss Hensley in some surprise.

"Yes, about Dilys and her return home to Mrs. Myrtle." He glanced at Marion, who played with the closed fan for which she had no use on such an evening. She bent her head in silence, and waited to hear what further he had to say. He continued awkwardly, "She has consented to—to—go to England."

"She has? I am so glad," cried Marion, "How did you manage to effect it?"

Owen lifted a bewildered insect that had

sought shelter from the storm, and placed it behind the sofa out of harm's way. With his eyes on the fluttering thing, he replied—

“I did as you suggested—I might say, ordered. I asked her to be my wife.”

“And she accepted you?” Her voice was low and almost breathless in her anxiety to learn the best and worst.

“After a few moments' consideration, and a question or two on her part, she said yes, with a heartiness which should have sent me into a seventh heaven of happiness.” But he spoke drearily, and without a spark of lover's ecstasy. Again there was silence, which Davenport broke with an effort. “I felt so sure that she was going to refuse my offer, that her acceptance startled me.” A sigh escaped his lips, and she moved restlessly, as a woman might whose ear had caught the cry of a creature that was hurt. Under pretence of succouring other straying insects he avoided her eye, and went on. “Well! the deed—right or wrong—is done, and she is to be my wife. I feel now that the sooner we get it over the better. I am going to press for an early marriage.”

She was still once more, and there was no indication on the immovable features of the fiery pain that burnt within her heart.

“Did she confess that she loved you?” she asked.

"By Jingo ! I forgot to inquire ! I believe she does, in her way. She is such an odd mixture of child and woman, wild thing and tame, that it will take me a lifetime to discover her real character. Her change of mood is one of the puzzles of her nature. Yet there is something fascinating, even though it irritates, never to know whether one may expect a kiss or a buffet. I shall have to prepare myself for smiles or tears, sunshine or storm, at a moment's notice, according as the spirit moves her. Perhaps it will make life more interesting to live with a wife who is an enigma and needs constantly studying."

With a man's egotism his mind dwelt more upon himself than upon the woman by his side. Having rescued every creeping thing within reach, he lifted his eyes to hers, and became aware that there were lines of pain about her mouth. Yet, as he saw the signs of suffering, he did not dream that his careless speculations concerning his own future were wringing her heart with odd pangs of jealousy. Recognizing the expression of sudden concern upon his face, she said—

"You will be sorry to hear that my father has been ill—I fear, worse than he will admit. He was overtaken by a heavy storm in camp. His tent was blown down, and he was drenched to the skin. Fever, of course, set in, a short, sharp attack, and more severe than any he has hitherto experienced. The doctors would not

allow me to be told until he was better, and had been brought into Cuddalore. It was just as well, for I could not have gone to him in camp, and I am wanted here. They are sending him up to Bangalore by to-night's train. One of the doctors is coming with him, which shows how weak he must be."

Owen expressed his sympathy, and asked if Rex knew of it.

"He is in another part of the district, and will not hear of it till he receives my letter. Father will arrive at six o'clock to-morrow morning."

The thunder roared above the roof as the storm spent itself, and the white lightning illumined the dripping landscape. The room was well filled with people staying in the hotel, and there was a buzz of voices which, without the aid of the storm, would have been sufficient cover for conversation.

"What a storm we are having," remarked Marion.

"It will do good, and lay the dust. It was almost unpleasant walking in the park this afternoon."

"Then you did not have your usual drive with Miss Tregethin?"

"No, I saw nothing of her. After our interview this morning I hoped that she would give me the opportunity of talking over the

future. She is as difficult to catch as one of those beautiful wild birds in the Lal Bagh. They are neither shy nor frightened, having never been shot at, but they are, in the best sense of the word, wild."

"What may be expected of an English girl is not what you will find in Dilys," remarked Marion.

Owen looked at his companion as though he would ask a question, yet hesitated. He found courage to return to the subject of himself as he met her friendly gaze.

"You have seen her two or three times, Miss Hensley, and have had some conversation with her. I wish you would give me an opinion."

"With pleasure," replied Marion, who had regained her composure.

"Do you think that Dilys is in love?"

He waited eagerly for her reply, which was slow in coming. The memory of certain remarks made by Dilys when Marion mentioned by chance her engagement to Rex, lingered in her mind.

"Yes," she answered, with deliberation. "I came to the conclusion that she was not heart-whole. But it was difficult to know when she was speaking in fun or scoffingly or in earnest."

"Am I the object of her affections?" he asked.

"Who else can there be but you? Since she has accepted your offer without hesitation,

you are justified in thinking that her heart has been given to you, and that she loves you in her own wild way."

Mrs. Stratton was approaching, and the *tête-à-tête* drew to a close. Owen had just time to reply in a low voice—

"I suppose I must do my best to deserve it, and—to be honest—I ought to make a super-human effort to return her devotion. You have set me a task, and for your sake, Marion, I will do my best to carry it through."

The rain continued the greater part of the night, but at dawn the broken clouds fled westwards, and a clear sky awaited the coming of the sun. As Marion drove towards the cantonment station in the dawn, she thought that she had never seen a more beautiful morning.

Mr. Hensley stepped out of the train without the assistance of his friend, declaring himself to be much better already. But he did not deceive his daughter. He had the fever-stricken look which is unmistakable, and he was glad of help in mounting the steps of the carriage. The doctor, who had travelled with his patient, left him at the station to go to a friend with whom he was to stay the night. He promised to call at the hotel after breakfast, and asked Miss Hensley if she would be in, as he wished to have a few words with her. He detected a sudden anxiety on her face, and added that there was nothing to

be alarmed at. The collector would recover if he would consent to be guided by his medical advisers.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon. Mr. Hensley was asleep in his room, and Marion, relieved for a time of her duties, went into the verandah upon which her bedroom opened. She established herself in a comfortable cane lounge, with cushions and rug. At that hour, the whole house was quiet and slumberous. Possibly, if her mind had not been in a tumult with conflicting thoughts, she, too, might have dropped off to sleep, lulled by the gentle song of the black robin, as it perched upon the scarlet poinsettia leaves. But she sat there wide-eyed, and wakeful, unmindful of the jubilant bird and insect life that revelled in the storm-washed garden.

An open letter rested on her lap, and her hand still grasped the closely written pages. It was from Rex, and in it he had practically refused her request. He begged that he might be allowed to follow her home in the summer, and postpone the marriage till then. "After the Garden House, with all its luxury, you could never settle down in comfort at the little bungalow in the fort. I should be obliged to go out occasionally into camp, and you would be left quite alone, except for the servants. If you were not nervous, I should be. It will be far better to adhere to our original plan, in which you promised to stay with

your father until he retired. Go to England with him in March, and I will get three months' privilege leave in June. We will be married in the summer, and on my return to India I have every hope of being transferred to a better station." Then followed regrets and apologies, with assurances that he was acting in her interests in refusing to hurry on the marriage.

"Perhaps, after what the doctor has been saying this morning, it is just as well that he has refused, for father certainly has need of me now," she said to herself, as she read his letter once more.

There was a step in the verandah, the light tread of an English shoe, and not the bare foot-fall of a native servant. Marion turned her head quickly.

"Oh ! Dilys, is that you ? Come here ; don't be afraid ; I am pleased to see you."

With a curious mixture of shyness and confidence, Dilys approached, and at Marion's invitation seated herself on a low chair close to the lounge.

"What is the matter, Miss Hensley ? Something has happened which is troubling you," said the girl, whose quick eyes read a story in the face of her companion.

"My father arrived this morning. He has been very ill with fever."

"I am so sorry for you," cried Dilys, with a

flood of warm sympathy, which her education had not taught her to restrain. "Here have I been thinking of nothing but my own affairs, whilst you have been full of anxiety. How selfish I am—but it is the way of this country. We are all for ourselves—until we love some one better than ourselves."

"And you have found that somebody?" asked Marion, watching her with searching eyes.

"I am no different from you if I have," cried Dilys, with quick retort. She let her eyes rest upon the letter lying in Marion's hand, and resolutely avoided the gaze of inquiry that would fain have read her inmost soul.

"I hope that you will love Mr. Davenport. He has told me that you have accepted him. You must do your best to make him happy."

"I will try, Miss Hensley," was the gentle reply. At the same time a sunny smile spread over the childlike features, vanishing as swiftly as it appeared.

"You will soon be leaving for home, Mr. Davenport tells me," said Marion.

"Home! This is my home!" burst from the lips of the other, impetuously; and Miss Hensley thought of the description Owen had given of his future wife. She said gently, but firmly—

"You know what I mean, Dilys. You will soon be on your way to see your aunt."

"I have not promised to go to England," protested Dilys, with signs of storm gathering in her face.

"You virtually gave the promise when you accepted the offer of Mr. Davenport. Have you seen him since?"

"No; he called this morning, but I was out. I shall take him for a drive this evening, and then, perhaps, he will talk of it. But——"

"Well?" said Marion, with encouragement.

"Whenever we speak of my aunt, I somehow lose my temper, and then I say all sorts of rude things to the dear Beast, as I call him. He is so gentle and kind to me, and never scolds. And afterwards, I am so sorry. Do you know how good he is, Miss Hensley?" She raised her eyes with a swift glance, and then lowered them.

"Yes, I know that he is good, and that you are fortunate," replied Marion, in a constrained voice.

"Do you know that it was pure kindness of heart that made him seek me. At first, I was irritated by what I thought was his interference; then I was amused; but now I am touched. He deserves to be happy, and I will do my best to make him so."

"Shall we talk the matter over now, you and I, and settle plans for the future?" asked Marion, her heart warming towards this emotional child of nature.

"That will be delightful. If I am rude and angry, you must let me run away at once and forget all my naughty temper." She bent over Marion's hand, and, taking it, with the letter, in her own, kissed it fervently.

"Dilys! You must not do that. You are actually showering your kisses upon the paper, as well as my hand."

"What is the paper?" asked Dilys, as the colour mounted to her cheek.

"It is a letter from Mr. Carwardine." There was silence for a few moments.

"Tell me about your father, Miss Hensley. Has he been very ill?"

"So ill that the doctors say that he must go to England as soon as we can conveniently start."

"When will that be?"

"In a fortnight's time. After breakfast we telegraphed for berths on the *Golcondah*, sailing from Madras a fortnight hence."

Dilys bounded to her feet with an exclamation—

"Ah! Mr. Davenport and I will come home with you. We will all travel together—you and I, your father and Mr. Davenport and—and——" She paused, and Marion smiled and made answer to the unspoken question—

"No, not Mr. Carwardine. He cannot get away just now, but must follow later."

Dilys remained buried in thought, the light in her eye betraying the working of her mind.

"I see it all ; it is a lovely plan ; we will go together. Why don't you say yes ! yes ? What are you dreaming of, Miss Hensley. There is something more in your mind."

It was true, and Marion was hesitating, undecided whether to speak what was on her lips or be silent. She was anxious not to do anything which might change the determination to return to Mrs. Myrtle, now that it was once formed. But, at the invitation given, she unburdened herself of what was in her mind.

"Don't you think that it would be better if you and Mr. Davenport went sooner. Every day is of consequence to your aunt in her uncertain state of health. It would be a wiser plan if you left Bombay by next week's boat, and travelled with the mail. We are going all the way round by sea on the *Golcondah*, as the doctor says that father will be so much better for a long sea voyage."

Dilys listened without any outburst of negation, and Marion, growing bolder, described the shorter route, strongly urging its adoption. When she had finished, her companion lifted her eyes and said—

"Are you sorry that Mr. Carwardine will not be going with you ?"

"Of course I am sorry," replied Marion, a little embarrassed by the sudden turn to personality in the conversation.

"I should not like to leave him if I were you. I would not leave him," she continued, with one of her flashes of emotion. "A hundred fathers and a hundred and fifty aunts could not draw me from the man I loved."

Miss Hensley gazed into her shining eyes with curiosity.

"As long as one is unmarried, a father has a stronger claim than a lover," said Marion.

"Oh! I don't think so. If you really, *really* love a man, he shines in your heart like the sun, which puts out all other lights. Even the moon and the stars grow pale, and are extinguished before his burning brightness. And when the sun is not with you, you are in darkness."

"Is that how you love, Dilys?" asked Marion, softly, her voice indicating a stirring of the depths of emotion within her own breast.

"Yes," was the almost inaudible reply. And Marion felt her hands seized in a nervous trembling clasp, whilst a hot cheek was laid upon them.

She recognized that this was love, the unrestrained passion of one who had not been taught to hide her emotions under a mask of indifference, which she was far from feeling. Did Miss Hensley experience something of the same sort of burning emotion within her, an emotion which she dared not show or even acknowledge

herself? Conscience replied that if such feelings found place in her heart, it was not Rex who called them forth. A spasm of pain wrung her soul. Repentance for her disloyalty, and despair over the sunless future, made life seem almost intolerable. At that moment she was grateful to Rex for having refused her request, and given her a respite. It was a relief when Dilys, lifting her head, said "I must be off." A quick, warm embrace, a few words of comfort uttered at random, but strangely pertinent, and her visitor had fluttered away.

That evening, after dinner, Marion inquired of Owen if he had met Dilys.

"She drove me to the Lal Bagh. I have never seen her in such high spirits. She was full of fun, and as tractable as one could desire. At the same time she again showed herself a woman of business."

"In what way?"

"She had apparently been thinking out her arrangements for the future, and they were thoroughly practical. As soon as we met, she insisted on driving me to the post-office, where, at her direction, I wired to the shipping agents to secure passages for her and myself."

"By the mail boat from Bombay next week?"

"No; she would not hear of the mail, though I explained that we should get home in half the time if we went across the continent. I was

afraid of a volcanic eruption," he continued, with a rueful laugh, "and allowed her to choose her own way, so long as it was in a homeward direction. Nothing would do but the *Golcondah*, sailing from Madras a fortnight hence. It would give her time to prepare for the voyage, and say good-bye to her friends, she said."

"Those mysterious people who have befriended her since Mrs. Myrtle's departure, I suppose," remarked Marion.

"She would not tell me. I telegraphed also to the bankers at Madras, requesting them to pay over the passage-money to the agents, so as to make sure of the berths. She insisted on doing this, and gave me no peace until I had completed the business. I am not sorry, except that it takes me away from my Indian friends sooner than I anticipated."

"Did she tell you that she had seen me this afternoon?"

"No; she never mentioned your name."

After a slight pause Marion said, "I have not had an opportunity of talking to you about my father."

"He is none the worse for his journey last night, I hope?"

"None whatever; the change is already doing him good. The doctor came this morning after breakfast. He has forbidden father to do any more work, and has ordered him home at once.

There will be no difficulty about his leave. The doctor says that it may cost father his life if he attempts to work on to March."

"Then you, too, will soon be going to England?"

"We telegraphed this morning, directly the doctor left, to take our passages on the *Golcondah*, wiring directions to our banker, as you have done, to pay the deposit."

"The *Golcondah*! Then that accounts for——"

"Yes; she knew what we had done, and formed a sudden resolve to travel with us."

"Once again it seems that we are the victims of fate. Yet, after all, why should we not travel together?" His eyes seemed to search hers to their very depths.

She turned upon him with nervous celerity. "You forget the ties that bind us both," she said, as she rose abruptly and moved away.

The next morning Owen hurried to the little bungalow on St. John's Hill. He was met by the gardener who had but one English sentence upon his lips, though he explained volubly in his own tongue, which Owen did not understand. The sentence so often repeated was "Missie done gone away."

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN Owen departed for Bangalore he elected to travel by the day train, arriving in the evening. Europeans usually preferred the night mail, leaving after late dinner. Davenport, with the enthusiasm of a visitor, desired to see something of the country through which the line passed. Rex was glad to have the whole day for making his preparations for camp.

The police-officer dined at the club, driving himself in the country bamboo cart to save time. The syce had gone on ahead, and he was alone. As he passed out of the fort the familiar figure of the gipsy girl darted forward from the deep shadow of the old fortifications, and signalled to him to stop. This was a new departure from her customary greeting, which was merely to place her hands together with a gesture of supplication. He pulled up sharply to avoid an accident.

"Hallo! What do you want? It is of no use to beg for that budmash of a brother." Though his words were not encouraging the tone of them was anything but severe. She made no reply

except to smile like a wilful child that knows no rebuke. She approached close to the cart, and leaning forward in front of the wheel laid her hands upon his feet after the manner of the suppliant native. With her in that perilous position he could only rein in his mare, and wait until she released him. He feigned an anger which he was far from feeling, and was dimly conscious that a very different emotion stirred within his heart. "Get away," he cried in Tamil. "If the horse starts on, the wheel will go over you."

"I do not care if it is the wheel of the cart that carries you," she returned, with a laugh that robbed her wild words of half their seriousness.

"Come now, no nonsense ! I shall have to call the syce to drag you out of danger."

"The forest tree laughs at the woodman who has no axe. The syce passed on his way to the club ten minutes ago."

"What do you want ? Tell me quickly and be gone."

"Give me your hand for one little minute, and I will be off like the sea-gull."

There was no reason why he should not humour her. He passed the reins into his left hand, and gave her the right.

"Good-bye ! Pearl of my heart !" she cried, pressing his hand to her forehead. But this was not all. After the touch of the cool forehead he was sure that he felt her soft lips sweep across the

back of his hand. In another moment it was tossed back, and she fled, with the laugh he knew so well, into the shadow of the earthworks.

He waited a few seconds, his heart beating tumultuously. Again he assured himself with vehemence that this was only another method of pleading for her brother. He reminded himself as he drove on that natives were given to an extravagant display of emotion, and made no attempt to hide their feeling. He was glad, however, that the syce had gone on ahead, and that there had been no witnesses to the little scene. He must see her again, he told himself, and point out that such behaviour on her part was unseemly, and must not be repeated.

As he was making an early start the next morning, he did not stay long at the club after dinner, but as soon as he had finished his cigar and a cup of coffee, he set out to walk back to the fort. It was a clear evening, and the moon, now on the wane, was not up. The murmur of the sea came across the sand dunes, and the breeze echoed the murmur as it swept through the soft larch-like foliage of the casuarina trees. In the distance the jackals howled and yelped as they foraged for their evening meal along the shore of the river. Noisy little brown owls screamed at each other amongst the broken masonry of the old fort, and from the beach came the plaintive cry of restless sea-gulls.

Rex stopped at the entrance of the fort and looked round. He wondered if he was being watched by a bright pair of laughing eyes, or by the less pleasant gleaming orbs of the big Lum-badee dogs. As he stood in the wide breach of the old earth walls, where once armoured men had tramped on guard, he heard the footfall of a naked foot upon the road that led from the sea-shore.

"Who goes there?" he cried in Tamil, as, nearly two centuries ago, the sentry had called in English.

"Naga, the police-peon, sir," was the reply, spoken in a subdued voice.

"What are you doing down here, Naga, at this time of night? It is not your beat."

"No, sir; I am off duty to-night. I have been in that direction on a little business of my own. Master promised promotion to any one who could find out how the English soldiers got their liquor." Naga moved towards the fort for greater privacy.

"That is true," replied Rex. "Do you know anything about the matter?"

"This evening I saw Corporal Barnes leave the camp. He went towards the pools where the poochee catchers hunted for poochees. I followed to watch. He had a native with him who carried a basket. I think he was going to fetch brandy from some hiding-place, and I was now coming to

tell master. If we go at once, we shall catch the English corporal as he returns to camp."

Naga's black eyes rolled eagerly in the direction he had indicated, and he trembled with excitement.

"Run quickly to the bungalow and fetch my dark lantern. It is in my sitting-room. You need not disturb the servants."

Naga returned with the lantern, which Rex lighted, shutting off the light. They started for the pools, following a path that ran parallel with a small stream. They arrived at a point where they were midway between the sea and the camp. A stretch of wild marshy land lay on the left. To the right there was a plantation of casuarina trees, which stood between them and the sea. A short distance further on, the stream widened out into pools of fresh water, indicating the presence of springs.

Naga, who was leading, diverged from the path and picked his way amongst tussocks of grass and scrubby vegetation, which formed a cover for their approach. Rex moved cautiously, stopping now and then to listen. He could distinguish the sound of subdued voices in the distance; also the occasional flash of a dark lantern like his own. The party apparently consisted of three or four men, who were totally unaware that they were being watched. There was a splashing of water, as though some one had

entered the pool and a heavy article was drawn out on to the dry grass. The police-officer himself could not repress the excitement that thrilled through his frame. As for Naga, he trembled as a dog under the controlling leash trembles at the sight of the quarry.

They crept close up to the group, and when within a few yards of the busy men, the police-officer turned on the full light of his lantern. The flash startled two Englishmen and two natives, who were all four bending over a wooden box. One of the Englishmen wore uniform.

"Hallo, corporal! What are you doing here at this time of night?" cried Rex, as he moved rapidly forward, Naga following close at his heels.

At the sound of his voice they raised their heads with a look of blank astonishment. At first no one took upon himself to answer. Then as the eye of the police-officer seemed to fix upon Barnes, whom he had addressed, that individual found his tongue.

"I am helping Mr. Brand, sir."

The corporal glanced at the pensioner, as though the explanation of their nocturnal business should come more properly from the older man. At the mention of his name Rex turned in some surprise to Brand.

"Is that you, Brand?"

"Yes, sir; you may take your oath that it is

the old man right enough," was the reply, given with that peculiar mixture of heartiness and good-humoured courtesy which Brand considered was the essence of gentlemanly speech towards his own sex.

"What brings you here so late? It must be ten o'clock."

"Well, sir, Corporal Barnes and I have been fishing all the afternoon, and as I was going home with Rammersammy—— Here, boy, bring that basket and show the gentleman my catch. I had better luck to-day than I have had for some time past. Turn your lantern on to it. There's a pretty picture!" he cried enthusiastically, as the gleam of silver scales caught their eye. "As I was telling you, when we were going home, we met the head-constable"—here, to the further astonishment of Rex, Soobarow stepped into the light; an involuntary exclamation escaped the lips of his son, and Soobarow's eyes blinked ominously—"and he asked if we could lend him a hand with a little private job, which he wanted to carry out by himself without the assistance of his mates. Here, you tell the master what you have found, Soobarow," concluded Brand, passing on the narration of the story to the head-constable.

Soobarow raised his hand in the usual military salute, and took up the tale in Tamil.

"I thought it best, sir, to conduct my inquiry without letting any of the force know, seeing that

there was the reward of promotion attached to any discovery that might be made. A turban can be worn by only one head, and promotion cannot be shared. So I kept the matter to myself, asking the aid only of men to whom promotion in the police force was nothing."

"And what is your discovery? This case of liquor?"

"Yes, sir. You will remember that I mentioned to your honour that the poochee catchers were often seen at night near these pools. I examined the pools, and when I discovered that there was a box at the bottom of one of them, I thought that I had come upon the secret of the spirit-smuggling. I tried to raise the box myself, but it was sunk too deep. Meeting Mr. Brand and the corporal, on their return from fishing, with their servant, I asked for their assistance."

"Which, of course, they willingly gave."

"Yes, sir. Mr. Brand sent his servant into the water, and together we pulled out that case."

He pointed to it, and bade Ramaswamy lend a hand in hauling it higher up on the bank. The corporal assisted, and the box was placed on level ground.

"It is a three-dozen spirit-case, I feel sure; and probably full of brandy. We seem to have got on to something this time, eh, Brand?" exclaimed the police-officer in English, unable to repress the note of satisfaction that rang in his tone.

"That's just about it, sir. But let's look in the box, to be sure that we have made no mistake," as he shot a swift glance at Barnes, who was standing stolidly at attention, after the manner of his kind.

"Have you any means of opening it?" asked Rex.

They looked at each other as though passing the question on, and Soobarow replied in the negative. His eyes were bent upon his son, who, to use his own expression, felt as if his liver turned to water beneath the paternal gaze. Once more his limbs shook, but this time from a very different cause. Retribution rather than promotion stared him in the face. He called to mind the terrible family conclave that was usually assembled when erring members, who had grown beyond the strength of the father's arm, needed correction. Uncles and cousins gathered together in the depth of the night, and the sins were judged over the bound and prostrate body of the criminal. Sentence was pronounced and punishment was administered on the spot, with the consent of the father and the aid of the relations. Thus do the natives of India wash their linen at home and steer clear of the terrors of publicity.

"Shall I fetch yammer and screwdriver from the bungalow, sir?" asked the unhappy young man with eagerness.

"Yes, and be quick about it."

Naga sped back to the fort, and ten minutes later the syce brought the required tools.

"Where is the police-peon?" asked Brand, in a whisper.

"Done gone home," replied the groom.

"That won't save his skin, the cunning devil," muttered the pensioner to himself.

Barnes was deputed to open the case, whilst the light from the two lanterns was turned upon it. Under the corporal's strong wrists the nails were loosened and the lid lifted.

"Bottles! Just as I suspected," cried Rex.

Barnes took one from the end of the top layer and pulled off the sodden straw hood. He held it up to the light. Spirit it undoubtedly contained; but there was something in the bottle besides spirit. As he turned it upside down two or three large, fat caterpillars floated slowly towards the inverted neck.

"That isn't the stuff that the Tommies get drunk on, sir," remarked Brand, with a laugh.

"How disgusting!" ejaculated Rex, as the corporal reversed the bottle again, and exhibited the loathsome creatures entombed within it.

"They ain't exactly what you might call ornamental, though they do put them up in the museums for show," ventured Barnes, with solemn humour.

"I'm afraid it is a false scent after all," said Rex, in a voice which indicated his disappointment.

"Certainly no one but those crazy German gentlemen could want such things as these." Brand spoke with sympathy, as though he was sorry for the disappointment of the police-officer.

"There is no doubt but that the case of spirit was imported by those German naturalists for the preservation of their specimens, and it can have nothing to do with smuggling; for I know that they paid duty on all the spirits of wine that they used."

"Anyhow, it isn't the stuff that the men want in camp," remarked Brand. "I wonder how it came to be left here."

"I think I can tell you," said Barnes. "The gentlemen must have filled the case with what they considered were bad specimens not worth carrying home, and their servant, Henree, as he called himself—that funny French Eurasian fellow that used to be so pleasant with everybody—had it carried down here to be thrown away; as, no doubt, that stuff what's pickled them caterpillars is poisonous."

"And the natives are such dirty warmints, they would drink it, sir, as soon as look at you. They are all alike, every one of them, only some are tall and some are short, some are fat and some are lean," said Brand, looking severely at Ramaswamy, as though the old man was responsible for this sad state of affairs.

Ramaswamy dutifully wagged his head in

cordial assent to the words of wisdom that flowed from his beloved master's mouth, and murmured, "Yes, sar."

"Let me look at another bottle," said Rex, the breath of a suspicion passing through his mind, as he remembered that the Englishmen present, as well as the natives—including his own head-constable, who had proved incorruptible in the matter of serious crime—were all of one opinion regarding the innocence of a little smuggling.

Soobarow picked up a bottle from the other end of the box, and held it up with the lantern behind it. The white spirit of wine was clear enough, but floating in the liquid were three more horrible entymological specimens.

"That will do ; put the bottles back. They are no good to any one. Where is Naga ? "

Rex glanced round in search of his guide, who was nowhere visible. The rest of the company, including the syce, held their tongues.

"Did the police-peon bring you here, sir ? " asked Brand.

"He was under the impression that he too had made a discovery——"

"Of the wine-case ? "

"No, not exactly that," replied Rex, whose eyes rested on the corporal. Having replaced the bottles, Barnes was busy fitting on the sodden lid. "Naga was under a wrong impression, in which he has not been singular. He meant well,

as did his father. Why didn't you take your son into your confidence, Soobarow?"

"Young tongues wag, and, moreover, there was only room on the path to promotion for one, sir."

"You have both been running on the wrong track apparently, and we are no nearer the solution of the mystery than we were."

Barnes looked up from his work. He was still turning the lid in his endeavours to find the corresponding nail holes.

"What shall I do with this case, sir? Better not leave it about, for fear of accidents."

"Throw it back into the pool after you have knocked the lid on. Do you want any help?"

"No, sir, except Mr. Brand's old man. He might stop and lend a hand."

"Then you and I will walk together as far as the fort, Brand," said Rex, as he motioned to the syce to go in front with the lantern.

Its light was scarcely necessary, for the moon was just lifting her head out of the sea, and there was no difficulty in distinguishing the path. Brand, with his creel slung over his shoulder and a bundle of fishing-rods under his arm, followed the police-officer after bidding Barnes good night. Soobarow was not far behind, his presence at the pool being no longer required.

"Are you sure that you're not after a mare's nest over this smuggling, sir?" asked Brand, as he trudged close at his companion's heels.

"Quite sure," replied Carwardine, positively.

"What proof have you, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"The intoxication of the men. You must know that it is pretty bad in the camp. The odd part of it is that the regiment has hitherto had a reputation for sobriety, and it is only since they have come to Cuddalore that they have become unsteady."

"Perhaps you are right, sir. But comparing present times with the old Company's days, it doesn't seem to be very bad. The major takes it to heart, being a strong teetotaller himself. We didn't have teetotalling in those old days. There was Havelock's lot, to be sure. The turn they took was religion more than teetotalling. But, Lor'! that didn't make any difference in the soldiers, and Havelock's lot could fight with the best of us. I shall never forget when we went into Cawnpore, just after the massacres, how Havelock stood up and spoke to us. There wasn't a man who was more eager to bring those devils to justice than he was."

"I suppose that those times set you against the natives."

"Only against a certain class, sir. We had our boys with us, and our water-carriers. They never failed us. No matter how early we started to march, those boys would have a drink of coffee ready, and the water-carriers wouldn't be far off

with their mussacks when we got into our next camping-place, parched with sun-thirst. No; they weren't the people we were hunting."

"A man did not live long if he drank hard in those days, I take it," said Rex.

"That's true; but as long as a man was not a regular drinker, we never used to think that liquor did him any harm. Some of the best soldiers I've known took their liquor occasionally."

"We haven't quite the same opinion about drink that was held a generation ago. I am sorry that this outbreak on the part of the men should have occurred."

"Don't you worry yourself, sir. It will all come to an end as soon as the men go back to quarters."

"I hope it may; but if they don't drink in cantonments, why should they do so in camp?"

"Lor'! sir; it's simple enough. The men feel as if they were out on the spree when they're in camp like this, with nothing to do."

"All the same, I wish I could help the major to stop it."

Rex spoke more to himself than to his companion.

"I know what I should do if I were the commanding officer," remarked Brand.

"What's that?" asked Rex, who was always interested and often amused to hear the quaint opinions of the old Company's soldier.

"I would give the fellows a heap of work—road-making, levelling, cleaning up the camp and the cantonment—so that they had no opportunity to get into mischief. And if they grumbled at having no time to themselves, I'd tell off a few every now and then for three days' leave. That's how we were treated when I was a youngster in the ranks. We each had our turn, if we liked to take it. One day in the canteen—I don't mean fooling at it, but just as much liquor as we could swallow ; one day to sleep it off ; and one day to shave and clean ourselves up and get ready for duty the next."

"What did the commanding officer think of such proceedings? "

"He was very strict ; but whilst we were on short leave like that, he was very blind so long as we were not violent. But, Lor' ! if he caught us when we weren't on leave, he'd just let us have it ! Not punishment so much as real hard work, which somehow or other he would make for us."

"What about the thorough bad ones? You must have had a few."

"Yes, there were half a dozen or so. They were no use to us nor to themselves. If the sun and the fever didn't clear them off, the commanding officer found means to give 'em the cat one way or another, and never rested till he had shifted them into another regiment. He was very strict, and wouldn't have any drunkenness

—not what you might really call drunkenness—in his corps.”

Rex smiled at the nice distinction. “Winking at occasional outbreaks wouldn’t be tolerated now-a-days,” he remarked.

“No, sir ; I am aware of that. And as far as the army is concerned, perhaps it is a good thing. But with old dogs, it’s hard to teach them new tricks.”

They arrived at the entrance of the fort, where their ways parted. Rex, after bidding the old pensioner good night, strolled round the glacis. He walked warily, remembering the Lumbadee dogs that had barred his way. But there was no sign of them to-night ; nor of their mistress. He looked down upon the old moat. The water was dark and still, the boat was gone, and he had the place to himself. He turned into his bungalow with a strange feeling of disappointment at his heart, which he put down to his want of success in elucidating the mystery of the smuggling.

The next morning, before daybreak, he was driving out towards his first camping-ground, sixteen miles from Cuddalore.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE time passed quickly for Rex Carwardine in camp. He succeeded in unravelling the mystery of the disappearance case. It was not a murder, but a conspiracy to bring an unpopular member of a village community into trouble.

In another part of the district he was engaged in discovering the thief who had robbed a temple of one of its most valuable jewels. Here he was hampered by caste rules, which excluded him and his most trusted subordinates from making a personal examination of the room where the jewels were kept. So absorbed was he, that there was very little time for writing to Marion. When her letter came, suggesting a speedy marriage, he was startled and disturbed. He wrote decisively on the subject, giving reasons which he honestly believed were paramount for his refusal to her request.

But while his letter rested on Miss Hensley's lap, as she lay in the verandah of the West End Hotel at Bangalore, news was brought which drove all thought of Marion from his mind. The Lum-badee had escaped from custody, and was nowhere

to be found. The old mother had been permitted to see her son. She had wept and wailed over him, and half an hour later had hobbled away with her cloth drawn over her head, and her whole frame shaken by sobs. When the evening meal of rice and pepper-water was brought in to the prisoner, it was discovered that he was gone.

"History repeating itself, I suppose," said Rex to himself, as he read the report. "If I inquire into the matter and can get at the truth, I shall find that two weeping old women left the cell. But the warders will never admit that they allowed two to pass out. I am sorry now that I did not thrash the fellow when he hit out at me and gave me an excuse. Brand is not so very far wrong when he says that they ought to get their punishment at the time, and not have to wait for it."

Although he had little hope of retaking the man, Rex determined to return to Cuddalore without delay. His mind went to the Lumbadee girl, whom he suspected of having planned and assisted the escape. Her attitude towards him was not that which was usual with the natives, and the memory of her provoking little laugh of mockery came back, and sent the blood racing through his veins. He felt convinced that she was sheltering the criminal, yet he could not find it in his heart to be angry with her.

It would take three days to get back to Cuddalore, marching with the camp; but by riding to

the nearest railway station, the journey could be done in a day. He decided upon this latter course. There was no business that was of any consequence on the route of march. The storms, which had driven in Mr. Hensley and laid him on a bed of sickness, made camping unpleasant, and this gave Rex an additional excuse for cutting his tour of inspection short.

The following evening he arrived at the railway station at Cuddalore. Knowing that he was not expected home just yet, and that no food would be prepared in the bungalow, he dined at the railway refreshment-room with the rest of the passengers, who were mostly going on by the same train that had brought them in. The meal was a hasty one, only twenty minutes being allowed. Then the bell rang, and all was bustle and confusion, until the engine steamed out into the darkness, leaving the platform silent and almost deserted.

The police-officer took a carriage and bade the driver go towards the fort. He passed the maidan where the camp was pitched, and inquired of his Jehu the reason for the unusual illumination of the tents. He learned that it was the evening of the non-commissioned officers' dance. When he was within a hundred yards or so of the fort he stopped the carriage, paid the man, and dismissed him. He had a wish to enter the fort as quietly as possible, having a faint hope that he might

discover something, or even take the Lumbadees unawares, if by chance they had sought refuge in one of the casemates. He waited until the sound of the wheels had died away in the distance, then walked through the mainguard entrance. Avoiding the garden, he bent his steps towards the spot where he had most frequently encountered the gipsy girl. At the bungalow no one knew of his coming, and, except for the dim light of the watchman's lantern, the building was wrapped in darkness. If the gipsy girl chanced to be lurking about the bastion or glacis, he might discover her hiding-place in the fort. That she had some such secret retreat he was sure.

With these intentions in his mind, he strolled round by the earthworks where the girl had first appeared, a point that was no great distance from the bungalow. He caught sight of the faint glimmer of the watchman's lamp in the back verandah, and smiled as he pictured to himself the guardian of his house sound asleep by the side of his light. It was an odd custom, he thought, for the thief to respect the watchman, whether he watched or slept, merely because the man belonged to the thief caste.

Now and then Rex stood perfectly motionless to listen for any betraying sound of human voices. The familiar murmur of the sea came in on the cool night wind, and the "rain-poochees," those shrill cicalas of the tropics, kept up a continuous

whirring on all sides till they well-nigh drowned the sound of the ocean. They were calling for rain, the natives would have said ; and the heavy clouds that hung low down on the horizon over the sea seemed to be listening to their cry.

There was no sign in the fort of any moving creatures, animal or human. The goats were penned close to the herdsmen's huts, and their small shepherds were already sound asleep. Not even a stray jackal was moving, nor did Rex catch a passing glimpse of a Lumbadee dog. He followed the path that led to the bastion where the animals, belonging to the gipsy girl, had barred his way. The path was free to him now. Pushing the bushes aside he endeavoured to look down over the wall of the bastion into the moat. Was that the boat lying on the black water beneath him ? He could not tell. A water-rat, disturbed by the presence of a human being, scudded down the broken masonry and plunged with a splash into the moat. It reminded him that where there were rats there were also snakes. He turned back, retracing his steps for a short distance. Avoiding the bungalow, he took the path that would lead past the old casemates to the main entrance.

He walked with eyes alert, as indeed it was necessary with only the starlight to guide him. Suddenly he caught sight of the faint glimmer of a light. It came from one of the casemates which

was occasionally used by the goatherds. There was a thick growth of scrub, which almost hid the opening, and it was impossible to approach from the immediate front. He retraced his steps until he came to the point where the vegetation ended. Here he could reach the wall. At the risk of snakes and scorpions he crept close to the masonry, with his shoulder in touch with the wall ; he made his way along behind the foliage, and noiselessly approached the spot where the light shone. It was slow and difficult work to bring each foot down without setting some loose piece of brickwork in motion.

He arrived at the casemates and listened. There was a murmur of voices within the gallery, and once the light was obscured, as though some one stood for a few seconds between it and the opening.

The police-officer was no coward ; in addition he possessed his full measure of conscious superiority which comes to all Britons who help to rule India. Although he was unarmed he did not hesitate a moment to enter the low-roofed passage, which might more justly be described as a tunnel. Continuing to tread silently and carefully he advanced towards the light. The gallery was some ten yards long, and curved slightly before it widened out into what was once a powder-chamber. This room was illuminated by an oil-lamp set in a niche in the wall.

On the floor squatted a man, native fashion, whilst an old woman was placing some pots, that had been used in preparing the evening meal, in a corner. The police-officer had no difficulty in recognizing the couple. They were the lame Lumbadee woman and her son, who had just eaten their supper. So secure were they in the knowledge of the police-officer's absence that they had taken no precautions against discovery. The watchman at the bungalow was asleep, and the ordinary native, including the police-peon, was far too frightened of seeing devils after sundown to trust himself among the ruined fortifications. They therefore chattered on unconcernedly, the old woman doing most of the talking. She urged upon her son the necessity of flight to the Konkane country, on the other side of the Western Ghats, until the trouble should be blown over. Rex heard her say, "Your sister will give you all the assistance that she can, but she cannot protect you, my son, after the police-officer returns. That man is a devil, and the enemy of our race." She cursed him roundly as she handed a roll of betel leaf to the Lumbadee.

Rex advanced to the entrance, where the light fell upon his form ; but even so the unconscious couple would not have detected his presence—so secure did they feel—had it not been for the growl of the Lumbadee dogs, which were fastened to a staple in the wall by short leather thongs.

The woman lifted her hand to silence them, then turned in sudden fear. As her eyes fell on the form of the police-officer, a hasty cry of warning escaped her lips.

"Fly, my son! Fly to the Ranee's room, and lie hidden in safety until we have silenced our enemy."

The Lumbadee sprang to his feet, and placed himself behind the dogs, which strained at their bonds, their glistening teeth gleaming in the lamp light, and their half-strangled throats emitting savage growls of rage. It was evident that they recognized Rex as a common enemy, even as their keepers had done.

"You may as well give yourself up quietly," said Rex, with authority. "If you resist, you will have to stay months in jail instead of weeks."

The old woman placed herself between her son and the intruder. A rage, which almost equalled that of the dogs, shook her, and her voice rose to a scream as she again cursed him.

"Not enough to rob me of my son, but you seek to rob me of my daughter! What spell have you cast about her that she is ready at the mere uplifting of your finger to forsake me and find joy in you?"

As she spoke, her son, moving under the protection of the dogs, crept along the wall. With a swift leap he reached an archway opposite to the one where Rex stood, and disappeared into

another gallery. Rex bounded forward to seize his prey.

“Stop ; it is useless to attempt to escape that way ; there is no outlet.”

His movement maddened the dogs, and they made frantic efforts to reach him. But as they were securely fastened to the wall by their thongs, he did not trouble himself further about the beasts. It was useless to follow the man into the darkness, not knowing how the gallery ran. As he paused, uncertain what to do next, the woman hobbled to the dogs and loosened their collars. In a moment they hurled themselves upon Rex with fierce growls and threw him violently to the ground. He struck out at their open jaws with his fists, shouting at them and keeping them at bay. Had there been but one, he might have succeeded in beating the animal off ; not only were there two, but the woman, now every whit as furious as the dogs, urged them on to the attack with words and gestures, which they comprehended. Frequently he struck them on the nose and eyes, but in his prostrate position he was at a disadvantage, and one of the savage brutes fastened its teeth in his left arm. The limb was partly protected by the rough tweed coat which he wore, but he felt the sharp wolfish teeth enter his flesh and lacerate it. At the same time the arm was pinned down, and he was unable to use it any longer in self-defence. The other dog

made for his throat, but he succeeded in pushing it away. Seizing it by the windpipe, he held it choking in his grip, with every prospect of its life being squeezed out of its writhing body.

The old woman, perceiving that the battle was so far equal, prepared to throw her weight in the balance on the side of the dogs. Her eyes shone maliciously as she once more urged the creatures to persevere in their attack. Arming herself with the curry-stone which she had so lately used in preparing the curry and rice for her son, she approached the recumbent police-officer. The murderous weapon was not intended for the dogs, and as Rex caught sight of her, he felt that in another moment all would be over with him.

There was a rush of some one into the chamber. The curry-stone was struck from the grasp of the Lumbadee woman with a sharp cry of reproach. A hand was laid upon the jaw of the dog that held him by the arm, and the other struggling beast was dragged from his grip. A voice he knew commanded the animals to be quiet, and the woman to stand back. Its effect was magical upon the human being as well as the beasts. The old woman retired, muttering wrathfully to herself, and disappeared down the gallery after her son. The dogs, with watchful eyes, remained quiescent now that they felt the restraining grip of the fingers of their mistress upon their collars ; but they quivered in their eagerness to

renew the attack, and whined when they were not giving vent to savage growls.

“Are you much hurt? Oh, I thought that they were killing you between them! Stay quite still for a moment until I have made the dogs fast.”

She spoke in English; and Rex, startled and confused by the abruptness and rapidity with which the attempt to murder him had been made and his life so miraculously saved, stood still at her bidding, where he had risen from the floor. As soon as she had fastened the collars of the dogs and once more secured them to the staple, she turned to him, her face alight with anger and concern.

“Yes; see, you are badly bitten in the arm, and it is bleeding.”

“It is painful, but I don’t think that there is much damage done. It was not the dogs I feared so much as that murderous old woman. You were only just in time to save my life! But how is it that you speak English? Who are you?”

He looked at her with wonder; she disregarded his question, and occupied herself with his arm, soothing the dogs with gentle words. At the sight of the enemy near the mistress their wrath broke out afresh, and they strained at their collars with renewed fury, panting to attack the intruder again.

Helping him off with his coat, she examined his arm. It was an ugly wound, and not a

pleasant sight. The animal, even with a mouthful of sleeve, had managed to pierce the skin, and blood was flowing freely. Tearing some strips from the end of her cloth, she endeavoured to bind up the wound, but she could not staunch the bleeding. She glanced into his face, which, under the influence of the unusual excitement and loss of blood, had grown very white.

“I will help you to the bungalow ; I think the wound ought to be bathed.”

An impatient movement on his part undid what little good she had done, and the shirt sleeve slipped down below his elbow.

“Let me go !” he cried, shaking himself free of her touch. “I have something to do before I can attend to myself. That fellow is in there with the old woman, and I am determined to take him. Bring the light !”

“Never mind the Lumbadee ; let him go. Your arm is much more important.”

Again she made an effort to bind the wound, but he wrenched his arm from her grasp, exclaiming angrily—

“You are as bad as the rest of them, whether you belong to the tribe or not.”

He moved towards the archway through which the gipsy and his mother had passed. It was wrapped in utter darkness, and he could not see if there were steps before him, or if the floor of the gallery was level.

“Bring the light, girl,” he repeated, with increasing anger.

The dogs, recognizing his tone, recommenced their savage growling. The gipsy girl did not stir to do his bidding, but laid a soothing hand on the animals’ heads.

Rex, with a strange singing in his ears, and an increasing sense of confusion and helplessness, walked towards the light. At the same time he felt the warm blood running afresh from the wound and dripping from his finger-ends. The gipsy stood watching his every movement with anxiety, speaking now and then to the dogs as they strained at their collars with each motion of the enemy.

“I don’t know who you are, nor whether you belong to the tribe,” he began unsteadily. “But I warn you that I shall have you punished for aiding and abetting——”

The light seemed to grow suddenly misty, and he was unable to complete the sentence.

When he came to himself he was lying on the glaciis, with the cool night-air blowing in his face. The girl, on her knees by his side, was pouring French brandy down his throat.

“Where am I? What has happened?” he asked in bewilderment.

“Oh, Pearl of my heart!” she returned in Tamil. “You are hurt; you fainted. My mother allowed the dogs to get at you. Lie

still for the present. You will be better soon and able to walk to the bungalow."

"Ah! I remember now. You came in the nick of time. If that second brute had done the same to my throat as the first did to my arm, they would soon have made an end of me, especially if the old woman had put the finishing touch with that curry-stone. Yes, you saved my life. Give me some more brandy."

She put the brass cup which she held to his lips, and he drank without a thought of where the brandy came from, or how it reached the hand that ministered to him.

"How did I get here?" he asked.

His companion, who was once more busy with the wounded arm, did not reply. He looked at her with increasing curiosity.

"You could not have carried me here without help, little woman. I suppose that Lumbadee assisted you?"

He spoke more softly. The anger that raged within him a short time ago had vanished, together with the excitement. A sense of weakness hung over him, and he no longer craved to grapple with his man. He had time, as his arm occupied the attention of the girl, to think over the situation. No one knew better than the police-officer how easily a runaway thief may become a murderer. The odd part about it is that the less a man deserves punishment, the more fiercely will he fight for his

liberty. The very sense of injustice from which he is smarting, incites a struggle for what he considers his right.

His companion did not reply. Rex watched her as she essayed once more to bind up the wound. The bleeding had lessened, and the second attempt at bandaging was more successful than the first. He was content to lie quiescent until she had finished.

"Now you may rise, if you like ; but be careful not to give your arm a jar."

Offering her hand, she helped him on to his feet. He retained the soft fingers in his grasp, and, suddenly carrying them to his lips, kissed them.

"Who are you ?" he whispered. "Not that old woman's daughter, I know."

The fingers he held tightened on his as he spoke, and, with an emotion which she could not hide, she said—

"Oh, Light of my eyes ! It was cruel to hurt you like this. But you must forgive my mother. She was beside herself with anger and fear on behalf of her son. He is a good son and a kind brother. Forgive, oh, forgive ! If she falls into the hands of the police it will kill her. Be merciful ! Forget their crimes, and forgive them this wicked injury which has been done. I shall be grateful to you for ever."

It was hard to resist such pleading. He listened

in silence, and, looking into her eyes, read something there which stirred him to the depths of his soul.

All desire to punish vanished, and every other emotion gave place to the one which had awakened his heart and set the blood racing in his veins. The evil doings of the gipsies were forgotten, the escaping prisoner, the wound in his arm. He and his companion were conscious only in that moment of madness, as they stood on the lonely glaci, that the world held but themselves. And the murmur of the sea, with the chanting of the cicalas, became a song of love.

CHAPTER XIX

ALL was gaiety and merriment in the camp on the maidan. A big tent was the scene of the festivity. The non-commissioned officers had spared no pains with their impromptu ballroom. A tightly stretched canvas cloth, waxed and French chalked, made a tolerably good floor. The roof and poles of the tent were adorned with garlands of foliage and flowers varied with trophies of small arms and flags. A long row of seats—camp benches covered with tent carpet—ran the whole length of the tent along the flies. These, according to the time-honoured custom of sergeants' dances, were for the ladies. Close by was a second tent, which was to serve as a bar and supper room. It was connected with the dancing-room by a covered way, which was carpeted.

As eight o'clock struck the guests arrived in a crowd, no one wishing to lose a moment of the enjoyment of the evening. They came in all kinds of vehicles, from the neat one-horse brougham of the D.P.W. overseer, whose lady condescended to honour the ball with her presence, to the

antiquated bullock-coach hired by Ben Bullen for himself, his daughter, and his friend Brand. The volunteers from Trichinopoly and Tanjore, the European railway drivers and their families, benefiting by the generosity of the railway company in the matter of free passes, turned up in numbers. Old pensioners, apothecaries, clerks in the various offices, all had received invitations, as long as they were European or Eurasian, and were made welcome.

The volunteers as well as the English soldiers were in uniform. Those who were unable to wear H.M.'s livery, relieved the monotony of evening dress by assuming coloured silk cummerbunds. Brand was amongst these last. He was resplendent in white trousers, a broad crimson sash in place of a waistcoat, spotless shirt with gold links and studs, and a neat little coat closely resembling a mess jacket to match the trousers. On his feet were a pair of black silk socks embroidered in crimson, and patent leather pumps polished to their highest shining capacity by the careful Ramaswamy.

The tailor had not failed in respect to his task of "barl-dress-making only," and Daisy appeared to be enveloped in a cloud of white grenadine, which was caught down with pink roses into lines and folds that followed the latest fashion. Youth did more for her complexion than powder, and her smooth young skin under the glow of excitement and anticipation took the softer tint of her father's

blood. Her large dark eyes were alight with eager expectation, and her full lips parted in tremulous pleasure, not unmixed with a certain hope concerning Corporal Barnes.

The bullock-coach containing the two pensioners and Daisy was driven up to the tent with much rattling and jerking of the vehicle, and snorting on the part of the frightened cattle. They were not accustomed to such an illumination of flaring lamps and torches as that which lighted up the camp.

Corporal Barnes was there to assist Miss Bullen to descend, and to show her the way to the little bell tent which served as a lady's cloak-room. A muslin bedecked dressing-table had been prepared with brush and comb, hairpins and powder-puffs, needle and cotton, and had been put in charge of a smiling and experienced ayah, who assured every guest in turn, as she relieved her of her cloak, that she looked very nice, "same like colonel's missie only." The ayah took Daisy's wrap, shook out the grenadine skirts, and offered the powder-puff as Daisy cast a comprehensive glance at herself in the glass. Thanks to the roomy old-fashioned bullock-coach, she had arrived without being the least crushed, which was not the case with those whose pride had demanded the more expensive conveyance drawn by a horse. She returned to the entrance of the big tent, where her father and Mr. Brand were waiting.

Bullen offered his arm, and led her to the row of chairs, preceded by Barnes, who introduced the new arrivals to the wife of the D.P.W. overseer. She was a large, voluminous lady robed in crimson satin and cream-coloured lace. She occupied the coveted position of being the chief lady guest of the evening. A gracious bow followed the introduction, though she did not include the Bullens in her narrow circle of friends, and a seat was found for Daisy lower down between two lesser lights of the country-born society of Cuddalore, with whom Miss Bullen was on a more intimate footing.

Rapidly each carriage discharged its load, which, in most cases, was not less than four, and the seats filled up from one end to the other with ladies, whilst the men grouped themselves on the opposite side of the tent.

The ball opened with a dance called the D'Albert. A smart young sergeant had been constituted master of the ceremonies, an office which still survives in the balls of the barracks. Stepping up to Mrs. D.P.W. overseer, he asked her if he might have the honour of dancing the "Dee Albert" with her. She rose at once with portly dignity and a broad smile of pleasure. Pushing a strongly scented handkerchief into his sleeve, he led her to the top of the tent, where he took up his position, and waited till the rest of the company had paired off. Then he pulled out his

handkerchief, dropped it on the floor as a man turns down a chair to keep his place, and flitted about the ballroom, adjusting the sets, and arranging the couples with warnings against mistakes. When everything was ready he gave the signal to the cornet and two violins, who supplied the music, and hurried back to his partner in time to make an elaborate bow with the opening bars of the dance.

The master of the ceremonies and his partner were the centre of observation, and their attitude was closely imitated by the whole room. There was only one man who in any way approached the sergeant in carriage and form. This was Mr. Brand, who, with Daisy as his partner—Corporal Barnes being compelled as one of the hosts to give the preference to the married ladies first—was eliciting a murmur of applause with his graceful evolutions. At every opportunity—and the D'Albets affords many if correctly danced—he chasséd before his partner, and turned her round in the smallest of circles until the room span before her eyes. Not a moment was he still from the beginning of the dance to the final bow. The handsome young sergeant turned an envious eye more than once in his direction, as he felt inwardly certain that the active old dandy of a previous generation had accomplished one more gyration than he had effected with his more portly partner. Fortunately Brand was slightly antiquated in some

of his movements. This alone saved the master of the ceremonies from losing the highly prized reputation of being the best dancer in the room.

No conversation of any moment was carried on during the dance. The figures were far too intricate, and the necessity of dancing them accurately much too great to allow the attention to wander. Brand had only time to thank his partner and to drop a few words of praise for her excellent dancing, before he led her back to her seat in the row of matrons and maids. The benches filled up as rapidly at the end of the dance as they had emptied at the beginning.

The master of the ceremonies, having conducted his partner to her place of honour in the centre, a seat which was considered her exclusive property during the rest of the evening, left her with a bow, and occupied himself with the arrangement of the next dance. Squares preponderated in the programme of the ball, which was posted up near the musicians and was the only one in use among the dancers. It was his business to see that all had partners and that none stood out who could dance. The round dances—chiefly polkas—found him equally engaged, introducing the visitors from Trichinopoly and Tanjore to the men of the camp. Of pretty girls and smiling matrons there were plenty. Many a warm motherly heart beat with sudden ambition and rash hope as the daughters glided

round the ballroom with the stalwart arms of British warriors round their waists.

Five events had been successfully carried through, and Daisy, supremely happy, once more took her seat on the bench. The ball—her first—was surpassing her anticipations, but up to the present Corporal Barnes, intent on doing his duty, had not come forward. Her heart gave a little leap as he approached.

“Miss Bullen, may I have the pleasure of the next dance?” he said, bowing to her as if she were the D.P.W. overseer’s lady herself.

Daisy rose with a murmur of assent and a mounting colour in her soft olive cheek. Barnes tucked her hand within his arm, and as he walked away pressed it close to his breast. Daisy felt the warm pressure, and glancing shyly up into his face, ejaculated under her breath—

“Oh my, Mr. Barnes!” and then giggled.

The corporal was delighted at the recognition and her manner of accepting his little advance.

“I have been counting on this dance ever since we sent out the invitations, and now it has come, I wish that it could last for ever, with you as my partner, Daisy, darling.”

The music struck up—it was a waltz—and as he placed his arm round Daisy’s slim waist, he gave her a little squeeze. She responded with a still more eloquent glance, as she exclaimed with emphasis—

“Oh my, Mr. Barnes! I shall have to tell my pappa if you do that, and what will he say?”

She was whirled into the circling crowd, and the couple, by mutual consent, gave themselves up to the enjoyment of the dance. It was indeed a dream of delight to Daisy as well as her partner. No one thought of shirking nor of standing out for more than a few moments to gain breath. Though the room was always full of gliding, circling couples, there were no collisions to mar the rhythmical motion. Every man trod his measure with grace, skilfully guiding his partner, reversing, backing, progressing forward with just sufficient variety to relieve the monotony. Romping, racing, blundering there were none. The sailor may perhaps carry the palm for good dancing in the services, but the soldier is not far behind him in excellence. From sergeant to private, if the stalwart members of the rank and file intend to follow Terpsichore at all, they take the trouble to learn her art before they venture on the boards.

When the last bars of the waltz died away, Corporal Barnes, with a farewell tightening of his clasp upon the waist of his partner, released her. A sigh of intense enjoyment escaped his lips.

“I could hold you in my arms for ever, Daisy, darling! Would you be happy there, I wonder?”

Her hand was once more upon his arm, and

he was leading her with reluctant steps towards her seat. She did not reply, but the blood coursed more quickly through his veins as he felt the pressure of her fingers upon his sleeve. It was sufficient to tell him a tale that he already knew.

"I shall speak to Mr. Bullen to-night," he whispered.

Daisy resumed her place in the row of ladies under the fire of several pairs of eyes. It was not difficult to guess that there was something more than mere acquaintanceship between the conscious maiden and the devoted corporal.

"May I bring you some lemonade, or will you have coffee?" he asked.

Before she could reply, Brand advanced towards the ladies with the confidence of an old hand. A servant followed close at his heels, bearing a tray on which were glasses containing beverages of different kinds, and plates of cake and sandwiches. The overseer's lady was the first to be served. She took sparkling lemonade and a ham sandwich, and thus set the fashion, which was adopted by most of the other ladies. With many bows and graceful compliments, Brand dispensed the lemonade as if it were champagne of the finest vintage. The master of the ceremonies came up with a word of approval.

"That's right, Mr. Brand. You see to the drink, and I will see to the dancing;" and he flitted away to arrange the next event.

Whilst the ladies were thus regaled in the ballroom, the men gathered round the bar in the refreshment tent. Here ærated waters, spirits, and bottled beer were offered, and partaken of with moderation. The business of the evening was not forgotten. Good dancing required a clear head and a steady brain, and this was not the moment for any indulgence on the part of the men of the camp.

Bullen, who had not been dancing, was pleased to have a small glass of brandy and soda pressed upon him. He was an abstemious man at all times, and was never assailed by any temptation to take more than was good for him. Perhaps for this reason his enjoyment of the excellent French brandy was the more keen; the cool night air had chilled him and awakened the rheumatism in his joints.

"Get me a bite of something, Barnes," he whispered, touching the sleeve of the corporal who had just come up. The young man brought a plate of sandwiches. "I never drink without eating, and I advise you to follow the same rule," said Bullen.

"Liquor has no fascination for me, Mr. Bullen. Though I am not a teetotaller, I very often let days pass without touching a drop."

Here Brand returned from ministering to the ladies. His eye fell on Bullen, who stood near the bar, glass in hand.

"That's right, Bullen. You've got some of the right stuff there. Brandy, isn't it? And some of the very best that can be found in——"

"It's good enough for me," interposed Bullen hastily, fearing that his friend was telling too many secrets. But Brand was not to be put off from having his joke, and from the amused expression upon the faces of his hearers, they apparently knew quite enough to be able to appreciate it.

"The police-officer didn't like the look of it. It had too much body in it for him." A roar of laughter followed this sally. "But he is a good fellow in his way, though he does want to know too much now and then."

"You will be caught one day, bor, and then you will find yourself in a tight place," said Bullen, who was not quite satisfied that the smuggling should be spoken of so openly in an assembly that included several strangers.

"There's no danger if we don't have traitors in the place," remarked Corporal Barnes.

"And they're disposed of for the present," continued Brand.

"What happened to that limb of a police-peon?" asked Corporal Spring.

"A sore back was the immediate consequence, and it is to be followed shortly by a wedding," replied Brand, with a laugh. "After all, there isn't much difference between the white man and the black when it comes to that. A stick for

punishment and a wife to steady us, is what we all of us come to need at some time or other. Here's to your health, gentlemen, married and single." He lifted his glass of cognac and bowed to his hosts, and then to the guests. "And here's to that gay dog, Henree."

There was a buzz of applause as the toasts were drunk. A scrape of the fiddle warned the dancers that it was time to seek their partners. The master of the ceremonies laid a hand upon the shoulder of Corporal Barnes.

"Got a partner, corporal?" he asked.

"Not dancing this time. I want to have a chat with Mr. Bullen."

The moving spirit of the ball departed with most of the men, and Barnes found himself alone with Bullen. The plate of sandwiches had grown less, but the old pensioner's appetite seemed in no way diminished. There was no time to spare, as Corporal Barnes would have to take his part in the next dance. He plunged bravely into the subject, and asked Bullen for his daughter. When he had finished, the pensioner said—with the characteristic deliberation of the man from the Eastern counties—

"What about getting her on the strength of the regiment?"

"I can manage that when I get back to Bangalore. I have a little plan in my head, Mr. Bullen. It's possible that I may be able

to get into the Commissariat, and if so, I should remain in the country like you."

"You might do worse—you might do worse. Have you spoken to Daisy?"

"I told her that I intended to ask your consent to-night."

"Did she seem satisfied?"

"Yes; I am sure that she likes me."

Bullen was quite sure of that fact, but he did not wish to appear in too great a hurry; it was not consistent with the dignity of an Englishman.

"You had better come over to mine to-morrow, and ask her if she is real fond. And if she says Yes, we can talk it over. There don't fare to be any objection but what we can set aside, if we be minded that way."

After this speech Bullen gave his attention to the remaining sandwiches.

"What objection might there be, to be set aside?" asked Barnes, with a touch of anxiety.

Bullen dropped his voice to a confidential tone, and replied in his strongest Suffolk accent—

"Well, there, bor, to tell you the honest truth, that's the drink."

"But, as I have just told you, I don't drink, Mr. Bullen. You know that I am one of the steadiest men in the regiment," cried Barnes, with a touch of indignation in his voice.

"It ain't what you put inside; it's what you carry outside that bothers me. This here brandy,

now, that I'm drinking—and rare good stuff it is too—Brand told me all about how you got it. You might easily have been caught and broke over that. There's no doubt but that Mr. Carwardine smelt a rat, but Brand was one too many for him."

"It was all that young police-peon's fault ; he split on his own father."

"Yes, and his father gave him a good hiding. I'm told that the boy had to go sick three days, he was so mortal stiff and sore. But he was getting too uppish, and something had to be done before he did any real mischief. He's all right again now ; I saw him about this very morning—his head up in the air, and his boots creaking finely, as if the place wouldn't hold him. And all because he's going to be married next month. There'll be no more trouble with him, I'll warrant."

"There was no real danger when he brought Mr. Carwardine on to the top of us that night. If the police-officer had asked to see more bottles, we could have managed to make those two do duty over again somehow."

"Well, bor, if you want to marry my Daisy, you must give up that sort of thing. There are other ways of earning an honest penny out in this country."

"Yes, I know ; the commissariat for instance. But it isn't only the money that's the attraction ; there's the sport, the excitement, and the risk.

It's like poaching," concluded Barnes, making a shrewd shot to rouse the old Englishman's sympathy. It told, and a slow, humorous smile, spread over Bullen's face, as he replied—

"There's no better sport in the world than poaching. It's next door as good as war, only in poaching you're after the game, and in war you're after human beings. But, in both cases, you're being hunted by men, and that's where the excitement comes in."

"It's better than big-game shooting," said Barnes.

"Why, if the gentlemen only knew what sport it was, they would poach each other's lands, and set their gamekeepers on to catch each other at it, drawing the line, of course, at shooting and wounding. That's three parts the reason why my old chum Brand is so mortal fond of the liquor trade. Howsomever, you must give it up. Married men have no right to play the fool with good billets when there are women and children dependent on them."

"So you know something of poaching, Mr. Bullen?" said his companion, well pleased to learn that his future father-in-law was not guiltless of the same sort of weakness to which he was now taking exception. Under the influence of the cognac, Bullen was ready to admit misdemeanours committed half a century ago. His eye twinkled as he replied—

"Yes, bor ; I know a good tidy bit about poaching. And I don't mind telling you, that it is all along of that there, that I'm out here."

"How was that ?"

"You see, I'd been birds'-nesting in the squire's woods, and had had good luck—such good luck that I forgot all about the keepers. And, there, if I didn't take and walk right into the middle of 'em !"

"But where was the harm of a young chap birds'-nesting ?" said Barnes, sympathetically.

"I was trespassing, but it wasn't that. They caught sight of my pockets which were bulging with eggs ; and, dang me ! if they didn't begin to lay about me with their sticks, until I was a mass of broken eggs. I never was in such a mucky mess in all my life. That was a rare old masterpiece from beginning to end. There was a talk of prosecuting me for poaching and trespass, and so I made off to the nearest town and took the Queen's shilling."

"I don't see why you need have run away," remarked Barnes.

"Well, you see, bor, they were pheasants' eggs."

Bullen having finished his "bite and sup" and the dance having come to an end, the two men adjourned to the ballroom.

Daisy's happiness was complete when later she was once more circling the room with the arm of her lover round her waist, and he

whispered in her ear that he had been invited to call on the following day.

The men in camp were doing the thing handsomely. A good substantial supper was provided in the refreshment-tent for their guests, many of whom were returning home by a night train which would not reach its destination till the early hours of the morning. The ladies were served first, and when they had finished, the men occupied their places at the narrow camp-tables. Daisy, with several other girls, took advantage of the absence of the gentlemen to leave their seats and wander about the ballroom. Some were bold enough to walk out into the open air a few steps beyond the extended flies. Among these latter was Daisy. As she stood at the entrance of the tent, just beyond the light of the lamps, she felt her skirt plucked gently.

"Jimme, boy!" she exclaimed in astonishment. "What are you doing here? You naughty boy! you ought to be in bed!"

"Have you got me some crackers and sweets, Daisy?" he asked, unabashed by her remarks.

"Here you are," she replied, emptying her handkerchief of the spoils of the supper-table into his eager hands. "Now run home, Jimme. Pappa will be so angry if he finds you here."

He drew her further from the tent. "Mamma is here; she wants to see you."

A stout figure shrouded in soft silk approached.

"Oh my, mamma! I did not know that you were here. Take that Jimmee boy home before pappa sees him, or he will be so annoyed."

"Yes, yes; but tell me, Daisy, child, has Corporal Barnes spoken to you yet of marriage? Oh my! I could not rest at home after you left. Three times I have seen him dancing with you, and my heart is hot lest he should not speak."

"He has spoken to me and to pappa. But you should not stay out in the night air; you will get fever. Now take Jimmee home, and I will tell you all about it to-morrow. We shall soon be home, as pappa will not stay long after supper. Oh! I have had such a happy time."

"My darling child! And you look so beautiful in your ball-dress, going round the room with Corporal Barnes. If he is really going to marry you, I think I shall go mad with joy. Oh! Daisy, girl, you are indeed luckee!"

Mrs. Bullen's fingers strayed lovingly over her daughter's figure, touching the pink flowers on her dress, and the ribbons and laces. There was a buzz of men's voices.

"Oh my, mamma!" cried Daisy, in sudden alarm. "The gentlemen are leaving the supper-table. Run off home with Jimmee before you are seen."

Mrs. Bullen cracked all her fingers over her daughter's head and vanished into the night, Jimmee following close at her heels, his mouth

full of sweets. Daisy slipped back into the room, and took her seat with the rest of the ladies, as the men advanced to choose their partners. Half an hour later, Bullen sought out his daughter.

“I’ve ordered the coach, Daisy.”

“It is early yet, pappa,” she replied, relinquishing the arm of Corporal Barnes, who was about to add his voice of protest, and beg for another half-hour. But a glance from Bullen silenced him. As Daisy ran off to the tent for her shawl, the pensioner said—

“Will you fetch Mr. Brand for me, please? He is sharing our coach, and I must see him safe home.”

“Is he——?”

Bullen nodded in answer to the half-uttered query.

“His tongue is going, that’s all. He is such a gentleman, he is, that it’s nothing but talk.”

Barnes understood his mission, which was not an easy one, and Brand was led, much against his will, towards the waiting bullock-coach. He insisted on shaking hands with all the ladies, and personally thanking them for the honour they had done the regiment by gracing the sergeants’ ball with their presence. Finally, under pressure from Barnes, who urged that Miss Bullen had been kept long enough, the old man was persuaded to enter the coach. The door was shut with a bang, the bullock-bells jangled as the

animals shied at the torches that lighted up the carriage drive, and Brand was carried safely to his own house. His faithful Ramaswamy was waiting up for him. A word or two from Brand's old friend and companion-in-arms warned the "boy" to be careful of his master, and keep him in safe custody for the present.

After seeing the coach depart, Barnes turned back into the ballroom to seek a partner for the next dance. A sudden change had come over the scene. The ladies had left their seats and were standing in groups. The musicians, who were men belonging to the camp, had dropped their instruments, and had joined an excited circle of guests and hosts.

"What's up?" asked Barnes of a comrade.

"Marching orders," was the laconic reply.

"Where to?"

"West coast. Moplahs in arms want bashing on the head. Train leaves at nine to-morrow morning."

There was no more dancing. Carriages were called up, and guests were hurried away. Half an hour later tents were being struck, and the men were busy packing. No one seeing them at work in their shirt-sleeves, would have imagined that only an hour ago they were absorbed in the evolution of the polka.

CHAPTER XX

THE morning after the ball found Rex Carwardine somewhat uneasy in the matter of his wound. A bite from a dog is always unpleasant, and sometimes dangerous. Rex thought it wise to let the doctor see his arm. He rode to his house, and, in answer to the question as to how it happened, he merely said that he had been attacked by a stray beast on the old ramparts. The doctor asked if he thought that the dog was mad, but Rex assured him that it was not likely, and that he had angered the creature by his own action.

As Rex rode past the camp he observed that all was bustle and hurry; loaded carts were on their way to the station, and the men had assembled in marching trim, and were ready to start. What remained of the camp was left in the charge of a couple of soldiers, who occupied a solitary remaining tent in the centre of the maidan.

From the doctor's house, Rex went on to the old town and pulled up at Brand's house. That individual was still suffering from the effects of last night's dissipation. Matters had not been

improved by an attempt on the part of the patient to cure his complaint with "a hair of the dog that bit him." The bottle that stood by his side was witness to the sad fact that John Elton Brand, Esq., was once more in process of being "overtaken."

Rex dismounted, and, giving the rein to the syce, ran up the steps of the verandah and knocked at the closed door.

"Come in," shouted Brand, breaking off in the refrain of a rollicking song—a favourite in the canteen forty years ago.

The police-officer endeavoured to open the door, but it was locked. Brand's head appeared at the window, which, with much fumbling with the bolts, he had managed to fling open.

"Oh! it's you, sir," he cried with sudden sobriety, as he recognized his visitor. "That black devil, Rammersammy, has gone to market and locked me in."

"What an extraordinary proceeding," remarked Rex, ignorant at present of the condition of the old pensioner.

"Did you want to enter my humble abode, sir?" asked Brand, whose innate politeness never left him, even in his most obscured moments.

"Yes, if you will allow me. I think you can give me some help in a small matter, if you will be so kind."

"You're not after a dozen of French brandy,

"I suppose, sir?" asked Brand, in a confidential tone.

Rex glanced at him sharply; the question was startling, but he kept his counsel, and replied indifferently—

"No, no, Brand; that's not at all in my line. I was only going to ask you a few questions about those gipsies I meet in the fort sometimes."

"Then you had better come inside, sir. Get into this window, and we will show that rascal Rammersammy that though he may be able to lock me in, he can't lock out my friends. Here's a chair. No, I can't come outside myself. I never go abroad unless I am dressed like an Englishman and a gentleman. It's quite easy to get in with this chair. There, I told you so. Now take this seat, and let me give you the least drop of Henree's best."

As the eye of the police-officer fell on the bottle, he divined that Brand had been drinking, but that he had only had enough to make him garrulous and a little thick in his speech. Perhaps the moment was not badly chosen after all for the cross-examination which Rex had in store for the old man. From the bottle his glance went to the strange apparel of the pensioner. Brand still wore the white dress shirt, gold studs, collar and tie of the evening before. The jacket had been removed, but the scarlet silk band round his waist remained. The neat drill trousers

were gone. They had been taken away, as a precautionary measure, by Ramaswamy before he left for the market. In their place Brand wore a pair of brilliant pink cotton pyjamas, excellent garments for night wear, but not the sort of thing in which the old soldier would allow himself to be seen abroad.

"You may well look at my old legs, sir. That confounded dhoby came last night just as I was having a drop before going to bed, and the trousers had to go. He wanted two rupees as well, the black scoundrel." Brand had confused his servant's demand for the housekeeping money with the dhoby's request. "Two rupees and the trousers! And that fool Rammersammy let him have them. I would get into my everyday breeches if I could find them; but every mortal thing is locked up, including myself. Did you ever hear of such impudence? But I'll strap 'em both, see if I don't. Lor', how I wish I had the governing of these natives."

Brand took up the bottle again, and was about to fill his glass when Rex stopped him.

"Wait a bit, Mr. Brand. I can't drink with you, and I can't talk to a gentleman who is drinking when I am not."

Rex's appeal was not in vain, especially when he put it in that way.

"Right you are, sir! I know my manners better than to do such a thing as that. If you are

quite sure that you won't have a drop—it's rare good stuff, and came straight from Pondicherry—I'll put it away so that I can't see it ; then perhaps I shan't want it."

"That's right, Mr. Brand," replied Rex, humouring the old man. "I have no doubt but that it is the very best spirit, but I never take it so early in the morning. I can't think how such good stuff gets into Cuddalore. I am quite certain that you never bought that in the bazaar.

Brand laughed slyly as he answered, "It will take you all your time to find out how we smuggle it into the place. But, Lor' ! you gave us a fright the other night. You very nearly had us that time."

"You were one too many for me with your pickled caterpillars—eh, Brand ? "

"Lucky for us that you didn't want to examine the rest of the liquor, for those caterpillars didn't go further than those two bottles. But I am not going to tell you how the bag of tricks is worked. You must go to Henree for that. You think it's those gipsies ? You might as well make the horse responsible for what you put in the cart he draws, as hold the poor chaps responsible for what they bring into Cuddalore."

"And this Henri, he's a cunning dog in his way. He takes good care not to be seen here now."

"That's true enough. If you want to put your finger on him, you will have to travel as far

as Bangalore, where he's killing two birds with one stone. He's helping those old gents to bottle caterpillars, and he's helping the men in barracks to a little luxury in the shape of French brandy. But you won't catch him. He can hoodwink the police, as far as that goes, and bribe them handsomely when he can't blind them further."

Rex listened in surprise. He hoped that no interruption, in the shape of the arrival of the old servant, would put an end to the revelations. So absorbed was he in what he learnt that the direct object of his visit was forgotten. He was reminded of it by a question put by Brand.

"What have you done to your arm, sir?" he asked, looking at the bandages, over which Rex had been unable to draw the sleeve of his coat.

"A dog bit it; one of those Lumbadee dogs that belong to the gipsy girl."

Brand shook his head with great seriousness. "I've often told her that she must be careful how she lets them loose. But she's so tender-hearted over animals, she can't bear to have them tied up for long. They're a great protection to a lady situated as she is, mind you, and I wouldn't have her give them up. But what I say is, 'Look here, my lady, you'll excuse an old servant if he gives you a word of advice. You must keep those brutes from harming anybody, or your ladyship's secret will be discovered.' But she only

laughs at the old man's fears. Lor', what spirits she has ! If she had been born in my station and in my generation, or I in hers, I would have married her and none other."

"Now, I should have said that a man of your taste, Brand, would not have married colour."

"Colour !" echoed the old pensioner, with a sudden flash of wrath. "There's no more colour in her ladyship—that's always been my name for her—there's no more colour in her ladyship's aristocratic veins than there is in yours or mine. Her father and mother were pure-blooded Cornish people, and as proud of their name and family as you might be."

As his companion babbled on, the police-officer realized that he was on the verge of more than one discovery. He kept silence, fearing to disturb the flow of speech, for he was still more or less mystified. Through the post he had learnt that Owen had found the heiress in Bangalore, and had wooed and won her. In face of this information it was difficult to identify the gipsy girl—to whom Brand was evidently alluding when he spoke of her ladyship—with the Miss Tregethin of Owen's letters. Presently Brand continued talking more to himself than his companion.

"I knew all along that she was far above me. I found her with her old foster-mother, crying her heart out at having to live like a gipsy now

that her aunt was gone, yet vowing all the time that nothing would induce her to go to England and leave the poor old woman, lame and helpless as she was. My heart went straight out to her, and from that moment I was her devoted servant. She has had every penny of my pay that I could spare, and every farthing that I could make fishing for fish or for French brandy. And Bullen and I managed her letter and her business for her, through Bullen's brother, who is employed in Mr. Davenport's office. And now she has come into the money, there is no need for me to trouble so much about the fishing. Yet it was fine sport with the two things combined. You would never guess why I go fishing with that big basket?"

"No," said Rex, with all the simple innocence he could muster.

"Nor why my boy gathers seaweed?"

"No."

"And I'm not going to tell you," replied the old man, with the self-satisfied chuckle of a confused brain. "You wouldn't think how cunning that boy of mine is, nor how sharp he can be. He has been a good and faithful servant to me."

Brand wagged his head solemnly, and prattled on about the making of Ramaswamy. Rex was desirous of bringing him back to the subject of the gipsies. The man might return at any minute, or Brand's brain might possibly become

clearer, when there would be an end of his revelations. The police-officer recognized the fact that his companion was a long way off being intoxicated ; he had taken just enough to loosen his tongue. Seizing the first pause in his chatter, Rex drew his attention to the wounded arm.

"I told you that I had been bitten by a dog?"

"One of her ladyship's, you said. How did she let it get at you? You weren't following her into her secret hiding-place, were you? I'd have you know that though I am only her servant, I am also her protector," said Brand, with sudden severity, and in a combative tone.

"No ; I went into one of the casemates to look for the Lumbadee and his mother. The man has escaped from prison, and I am afraid he will get away."

"And a good job too, poor beggar, if you will excuse me saying so."

"I found him and his mother with the dogs, and when I tried to take him, the woman let the brutes loose and set them at me. I should have been torn to pieces and killed if—if—her ladyship, as you call her, had not come to my rescue. She saved my life, and now I want to thank her."

"And you don't know where to find her?" asked Brand, with growing suspicion.

"She is not in the casemate where I saw her last night."

"No ; it's no use looking for her there."

"The dogs and the gipsies are also gone."

Rex waited, hoping that his listener would be inspired to talk again, but there was no reply.

"It is wonderful how the glacis is tunnelled with galleries and powder-chambers. I am told that the soldiers used them as barracks in the old days," he remarked.

"That's true enough. We laid in the casemates at Fort St. George when my regiment was quartered there."

"Very hot and stuffy they must be, especially for a lady," ventured the police-officer.

"Not at all, sir ; not at all. The one I chose for her ladyship is as cool and airy almost as your own bungalow, which stands nearly atop of it, only you face the river, and her room faces the sea. The breeze blows straight in from the sea, and it is as cool and as pleasant at this time of the year as you could wish."

"Those casemates are curious front doors for a lady's house. More suitable for a snake's dwelling."

Brand sat up in his chair, and eyed his visitor with a sly expression. His brain was losing a few of the clouds, but it was not clear enough yet to put the necessary curb on his tongue.

"That was my opinion too, and so I arranged that she should not have such a front door. You may try every casemate in the fort, blocked or

open, and you will never find my lady's bower—as I call it. It's no use asking me. I am not going to let that cat out of the bag. As it is, I seem to think that I have let out more than I intended. What I want is a strong cup of coffee. I wish that scoundrel, Rammersammy, would come home. I shall have to strap him for leaving me like this. If I only knew where to look for my trousers—my old fishing trousers would do, if I couldn't find any others! Did you ever hear of such impudence, sir? Lor', if I was Governor of Madras, I'd make these black fellows sit up! What, must you be going? You will have to go by the way you came. It's not how I like to treat a gentleman who has done me the honour of paying me a visit. And you won't have a drop to drink before you go, sir?"

"No, thank you, Brand, and I advise you to follow my example. Gentlemen don't usually take any liquor until their tiffin."

"And you're not angry with me for refusing to tell you any more. Secrets are secrets, especially where ladies are concerned, and they must be kept at all price."

"It's all right, Brand; don't you worry. I know all I want to know."

"I am not usually so rude as to refuse a gentleman any request when he takes the trouble to call in person. But it is all that dhoby, confound him! I feel so helpless and unlike

myself without my trousers. Two rupees and the trousers ! I hope you will forgive me, sir."

"Don't mention it, Brand. Good morning, and I am much obliged to you. I know all I want to know."

Rex departed the way he came, and mounted his mare as quickly as possible. He turned her head up the street, his brain in a whirl. So this, then, was the secret of the smuggling. He remembered Henri, the useful valet, who accompanied the German entomologists. The man had been so open about the invoices and custom receipts that no suspicion of forgery had arisen, or that they represented more spirit than was used or paid for by the Germans. And Soobarow, what of him ? He had proved his integrity in more serious cases of crime than smuggling. Rex called to mind the fact that the whole of the force under him took a different view from that of Government concerning the offence. As he passed the house of the head-constable, that individual was just coming out. The police-officer pulled up to say something about the duties of the morning.

"By-the-bye, Soobarow, has any one called for the letter which came some time ago for Miss Tregethin ?" Rex asked presently.

"No, sir ; my wife has it still."

"Let me have it ; I will take it now if you will fetch it."

As Soobarow handed it to him, Rex asked if any one had seen it.

"Only Mr. Brand and Mr. Bullen. When it first came I took it to Mr. Bullen's house to ask his advice, and Mr. Brand happened to be there. They both advised me to lock it up, and so I gave it to my wife."

The head-constable looked supremely innocent, and the police-officer wore a corresponding expression of ignorance as they parted. A little way out of the town Rex opened the envelope, and drew out a blank sheet of paper. He smiled in spite of his annoyance.

"If it wasn't for Brand's weakness I would get him to join the police force, on the same principle that a poacher turned outside in makes a good gamekeeper."

The old pensioner was still standing by the window through which Rex had made his exit. The fresh air was helping to blow away the mist of confusion that fogged his brain. He lifted the chair from the ground, brought it inside, and set it down near the window.

"Mustn't let Rammersammy know how I can get in and out of the window. But how can I go out in these silly togs? I shall be taken for a Mohammedan."

He gazed ruefully at the bright pink garments which barely reached to the top of his black silk embroidered socks. "The scoundrel! He

deserves the biggest hiding that he ever had." He turned and looked at the table. "Now, where did I put that bottle?"

There was a long pause, during which he made an effort to pull himself together. Taking a few steps towards the cupboard where he had hidden the bottle, he stopped. "Hold on, John Elton Brand, Esq. Not so fast, or you will be overtook before you know where you are."

He dropped into a chair, and, placing his elbows on the table, rested his head on his hands. "Let me think. That was the police-officer. Now, what did I tell him besides the two rupees and the trousers? I must put my dunder head into a bucket of water, and try to remember what I said. 'I know all I want to know.' Those were his words. He knows all he wants to know, does he? Then, by gum! he knows too much."

CHAPTER XXI

THE servants left in charge of the bungalow had done their best in the absence of the butler to provide their master with a suitable breakfast. Fried fish, a highly seasoned curry, toast and boiled eggs awaited Rex on his return from his ride. As he ate, he looked at his letters. There was one from Owen which confirmed his previous news. "Miss Tregethin herself took our passages home by the *Golcondah*. I suppose we shall be married as soon after our arrival in England as is convenient."

The brow of the reader clouded and the colour touched his cheek. "I don't quite understand how she can be in two places at once, engaged to Davenport and allowing me——" He checked the thoughts that were running away with him, and opened Marion's letter. It was of some length. She acquiesced in his proposal that their wedding should be put off until the summer. It was best, she said, in consideration of her father's health that she should be free to nurse him in England until he was stronger. They

would come down to Cuddalore for a couple of nights to pack up, and then go on to Madras to meet the steamer. From this subject the writer went on to speak of Owen Davenport, giving her own account of the wayward heiress. "I think that she is in love with him, but she is too wild a creature to show it in the ordinary way."

The letter was calm, explanatory, and dispassionate. It dropped limply from the reader's fingers, and he was conscious that the last sentence jarred, though why it should do so he did not stop to inquire.

Heiresses and gipsy girls could be nothing to him. The broad light of day as usual established reason, and dethroned sentiment in the soul of the police-officer. The memory of the evening before remained; reason decreed an explanation as soon as was possible, and honour demanded a recognition of the rights of his friend.

He hastily swallowed his coffee, and, putting on his sun-hat, made his way to the glacis. The casemates would not guide him to "her ladyship's bower," the old man had said. Her hiding-place was in the bastion upon which the bungalow stood—to the east of it, if the north-east breeze blew in at her window. He recalled the night when the dogs had barred his way, and she would not allow him to advance further than a certain point. Had he followed the path, it would have led him down to the edge of the moat, just below

the place where the wall merged into a steep slope of the earthworks, which at one time were faced with masonry.

Turning towards the old bastion, he followed the goat track leading to the top of it. The herd, that sometimes fed there, was on the other side of the bungalow, so that he had the ramparts to himself. A fringe of thorn bushes grew along the edge of the parapet where formerly there had been a coping of stone. The thick growth filled the gun embrasures, and straggled over the walls themselves, finding foothold between the masonry. It was difficult to see where the brickwork ended. The goat's-foot creeper with its strong arms held the earth together, and protected it.

It was on this slope that the way had been barred by the dogs. This morning there was no obstruction, and though the descent to the water's edge was neither easy nor pleasant walking, he succeeded in its accomplishment. Bushes and tall pampas grass bordered the moat on the fort side, half hiding the water from sight. Through the foliage he could see the boat belonging to the old pensioner lying in the middle of the stream. It appeared to be anchored by a long rope, which was attached to some point higher up under the wall.

At any other time he would have taken no notice of the clumsy country-built craft, in which he had so often seen Brand pottering about the

river. But to-day everything wore a different aspect. The innocent old boat no longer looked innocent, but presented an admirable capacity for smuggling. It might possibly be the key to her ladyship's bower.

Rex searched for means of reaching the boat, which lay too far out for him to step into it. He endeavoured to move up along the bank towards its anchorage, but was arrested by the wall. There was a sluggish stream in the moat, caused by the falling of the tide, which is slight on the coast of India. Returning to the spot where the path met the water, he examined it more closely, glancing up and down the moat and across, then casting his eye back to the slope he had descended. As he did so he caught sight of some strong cord, which rested in the fork of the bush under which he stood. He lifted the coil from its place, and found that a stone was attached to one end, whilst the other was securely fastened to a branch.

Suddenly he guessed the use to which it had been put. Clearing the rope from all obstruction, he flung the captive stone into the boat. It was not a difficult task to draw it to the edge of the bank, and to jump in, throwing out the stone before pushing off. There were oars and a boat-hook lying in the bottom, but Rex bethought him of a simpler plan of progression up the stream. Going to the bows, he hauled on the rope and pulled himself up some eight or ten

yards until he reached the point to which the boat was fastened. This proved to be the stem of a tree which grew from a crack in the masonry.

Standing upright, with his hand on a branch, he peered through the foliage and discovered an archway just above the mark of the high tide. There was easy access to the opening by means of stones which projected from the wall, and to make the ascent still more easy, a rope hung down by the side of them to assist the climber.

The pulse of the police-officer beat quickly as he grasped the cord and stepped out of the boat, which, thus released, floated slowly back to its original position down stream. In another minute he was standing on the threshold of a powder-chamber, with arched roof and walls of earth cased with brickwork.

A strange sight met his eyes. The floor was spread with Cashmere rugs, and two doorways, leading into inner rooms were curtained with bright-coloured palampores. Bamboo easy-chairs, light tables strewn with books, workbasket, and other feminine odds and ends, proclaimed the fact that this was none other than my lady's bower. The room was cool and airy, the breeze blowing in from the sea, rustling the foliage of the tree outside with a pleasant sound.

"You are early, Mr. Brand," said the voice which was familiar to the ears of the police-officer. It proceeded from the luxurious depths of a

grasshopper couch, which was so placed that the light from the archway fell on the leaves of a book held by the occupant, and not upon the face of the reader.

“I am not Brand, Miss Tregethin.”

The girl sprang from her chair like a startled animal. Various emotions crossed her features—surprise, dismay, and something else as well, that set the blood tingling in the veins of her visitor. His own face betrayed some surprise, but it was mingled with amusement and, perhaps, a suspicion of triumph. It was not the gipsy girl who stood before him, momentarily dumb with astonishment. From the crown of her head to the sole of her foot she was English. Her dark hair was dressed in much the same style as that affected by Miss Hensley, and her neat tailor-made frock could only have been built by European fingers.

She flung the book upon the table, and advanced towards him as he hesitated at the entrance, undecided as to the attitude which he ought to adopt. She left him little choice in the matter.

“Why have you ventured to enter my private room without an invitation?” she asked with cold dignity, as soon as she had regained her self-possession.

“I found my way here accidentally. You must forgive me if I have trespassed. I am searching for the prisoner who has escaped.

“He is not here. By this time he and his

mother are safely out of your reach," she replied, with a touch of defiance in her tone.

"Then I have only to thank you again, Miss Tregethin, for having saved my life. If you had not interfered, the old woman, with the help of the dogs, would have murdered me."

"That would have been horrible!" she rejoined in a low voice.

He was about to retreat, if it were possible, by the same way in which he had come, when she said—

"Since you are here, stay and tell me how you found out the secret of my hiding-place."

Her tone was softer and she was less on the defensive. She pointed to a chair near the grass-hopper couch.

"Won't you sit down for a few minutes. I want to know how your arm is. Were you much hurt last night?" She sank back amongst her cushions as he took the chair she had indicated.

"I lost a good deal of blood, as you know, but the wound is better since the doctor dressed it. I am afraid I have not improved it by using my hand in working your primitive ferry."

"It is Mr. Brand's fishing-boat," she corrected.

He laughed heartily. "It serves many other purposes, from all I hear and see. I have no doubt that it helped, with your kind assistance, that graceless pair to escape last night."

She joined in the laugh, but became serious again as she said—

“She is my foster-mother. You must forgive me for aiding and abetting them to evade the law.”

The murmur of the sea came in on the breeze, which filtered through the green curtain of foliage before the door. A water wagtail, that had its nest in the masonry just above the water, burst into song like a canary, and a hoopoe uttered its dove-like note as it sunned itself on the wall. Rex glanced round him with an appreciative eye. At the same time it occurred to him that Miss Tregethin had made a poor exchange, when she might have gone to England as a prospective heiress.

“So you forsook your aunt for that wretched old woman who would have murdered me?” he remarked.

“She was good to me in my babyhood. It nearly broke her heart to give me up to my aunt. But she did it for my good. When I was at school, at Pondicherry, she was constantly visiting me, giving me the mother’s love which was not in the heart of my childless relative. Then she met with the accident that lamed her, and could no longer travel with the tribe. Unknown to my aunt, she lived among the estate coolies, and my pocket-money supported her. You know the rest?”

“Not quite,” answered Rex, unwilling to betray Brand.

"I soon found that I had undertaken more than I had bargained for. It is one thing to play at being a gipsy in mad moments of frolic"—she paused as their eyes met—"but it is quite another to live permanently as a native, even though one has been brought up to it as a child. In my dilemma an Englishman came to my assistance. He provided me with this room, which he had discovered in his fishing expeditions. My foster-mother acted as ayah and cook. In the hot season I had the use of a small bungalow at Bangalore in which he had invested his savings. The gipsy whom you have been persecuting—yes"—she nodded her head—"I mean persecuting—gave his mother sufficient to feed and clothe her, so that her service to me has been a service of love. How soon did you guess that I was Dilys Tregethin?" she asked abruptly.

"Last night, after I got home, I thought over all the circumstances of our meetings. You spoke English as no gipsy girl could speak it; and as I lay awake, my arm being painful, I came to the conclusion that you were not what you pretended to be."

"Perhaps it will be best for us to forget the incidents of last night," she said.

"You are right. It is absolutely necessary that they should be forgotten."

He resolutely turned his eyes away, lest he should forget something else, which must at all

hazards ever be kept in his memory, his engagement to Miss Hensley. His gaze went out to the yellow stretch of sand and blue sea beyond, which were just discernible through the leafy screen before the archway.

"Has Mr. Davenport written to you?" asked Dilys.

"I have heard from him several times. He tells me that you are going to England with him, and that you will be married soon after your arrival there."

"And Miss Hensley is going with us. Are you sorry not to be coming too?" she asked, leaning forward and scanning his face.

He did not reply to her question, but said, "It is impossible for me to get away just yet. Miss Hensley knows that it is so."

The level tone in which he spoke hid all sign of emotion. She leaned back in her chair—

"Now, tell me how you discovered my hiding-place. Surely, it was not by mere accident. You must have had some clue."

"Perhaps I had. You remember how the dogs barred my way one evening, when I would have followed the path to the water's edge."

She glanced at him with a laugh, the little mocking laugh of the gipsy girl, and tossed her head with a gesture of disbelief. However, she did not pursue the inquiry since he was unwilling to explain.

"This is your first visit ; it must be your last," she said in decisive tones.

"I quite understand that," he replied with sudden earnestness, which brought the colour to her cheek. After a pause, during which she kept silence, he added, "It will be as well if it is also our last meeting." She bowed her head in acquiescence. "I suppose that you are aware that Owen Davenport is an old friend of mine."

"I hope that he also bears the fact in mind."

He looked up with a puzzled glance, and she noted that his eyes wore an expression of pain. A pang shot through her heart, but she closed her lips resolutely on the words which rose at the sight of his distress.

"Will you go down to Madras to see Miss Hensley off by the *Golcondah* ?" she asked presently.

"Most probably."

"Then I shall meet you once more before I sail. As I am not to see you again between this and my departure, I want you to do me a favour."

The words were uttered in that soft, pleading tone which he had heard upon the lips of the gipsy girl. It was impossible to be severe, and he did not attempt to harden his heart.

"If I am able to do it, I will with pleasure."

"Promise me that you will not persecute nor prosecute any of my old friends. Recollect what the tribe has done for your country-woman. And,

believe me," she said, with greater earnestness, "if you only knew how to manage them, they would be your devoted friends, whereas now you make them your enemies."

He smiled as he replied, "I am to wink at their breaches of the law, you mean."

"There will be no breaches of the law when the soldiers are gone. As a rule, the Lumbadees are a peaceful, inoffensive tribe, their greatest fault being to steal a fowl here and there, or to pick up a brass pot or garment left in their way. My foster-mother is too old to be tramping about, hiding from the police. It will kill her. Her son must return to the tribe and earn for himself and for her without fear of further persecution. Mr. Carwardine, will you not promise me this, remembering what I did for you last night?"

"You saved my life, and have a right to ask for something in return. It shall be as you wish."

He rose to go. With a warm, impulsive movement she clasped his hand, and her gratitude poured from her lips—

"I know you will keep your word now that you have given it. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your mercy. I am sure that you will not repent it."

"It is well for me that you are passing out of my life, or you would lead me into being a law-breaker myself."

"No, no. I would show you how these

people—about whom you know so little—might be taught to keep your laws instead of breaking them.”

He bent over her hand and kissed it. “Good-bye, Miss Tregethin ; your friends in future shall be my friends wherever it is possible, though you and I must be strangers.”

The sound of bubbling water beneath the keel of a boat fell on their ears. They turned towards the archway. There was a hasty footstep upon the stones, and Brand, panting for breath, sprang into the room.

He wore the same costume in which he had received Rex, except that he had assumed the white coat of the evening before. To the waist he was still the dapper figure that had whirled the ladies round in the “Dee Albert” to the admiration of the whole ballroom. Below the crimson silk cummerbund appeared the garments of night, the full pink cotton pyjamas, none too long in the leg, and from which his feet and ankles protruded, displaying the silk socks and patent leather pumps.

“My lady, I stand here as a shamed and shameful creature. I see that I have come too late.” He glanced from Dilys to the police-officer. “My cursed tongue, loosened by liquor, let out the secret of your ladyship’s bower to that gentleman.”

Miss Tregethin and Carwardine regarded the

old man in silent wonder. Unconsciously their eyes rested more upon his marvellous dress than upon his features. Whatever may have been his condition an hour ago, he was sober enough now, and, moreover, fully alive to the situation in which he found himself. The direction of their glances did not escape his attention.

“I came in this ridiculous dress—more worthy of a Mohammedan than an English gentleman—I came to warn you, my lady, of the mischief I had done. But I see I am too late—too late.”

By this time Dilys had recovered from her surprise.

“Don’t blame yourself, Mr. Brand. No harm has been done. I was glad to see Mr. Carwardine to say a few words on behalf of my old friends, the Lumbadees.”

The old pensioner would listen to no excuse. “I have been unfaithful and am unworthy of your trust, my lady. If I had only told him my own secrets it would not have mattered. But to have given away yours——”

His voice broke, and he was unable to complete the sentence. He stood there the picture of abject misery and self-condemnation, and refused to be comforted. The tragic pathos of his words accorded ill with his ridiculous costume, which would have admirably suited the singer of nigger songs upon the sands of an English seaside town. Miss Tregethin’s eyes became a trifle brighter as

she listened, but she would not allow the ghost of a smile to touch her lips.

"I assure you, Brand, that you have done more good than harm. Miss Tregethin has extracted all sorts of promises from me on behalf of her Lumbadee friends, and I suppose on your behalf too, since she claims you also as a friend," said Rex.

"The best I have in the world. He has been like a father to me," she cried with warmth.

But Brand would not be comforted. He hung his head in self-abasement, and repeated again and again—

"I can never forgive myself—never !"

"You must not be too hard upon yourself, Brand. I fancy it was the supper last night that upset you."

"Yes, sir ; there's no doubt about it. I've been overtook. And to think that I should have appeared before her ladyship without my trousers ! It only adds insult to injury."

Nothing that they in the kindness of their hearts could say would comfort him ; nor would he for one moment admit that his conduct was otherwise than traitorous. He turned at last to Rex—

"Here, take me, sir, and prosecute me all you like for my smuggling. I want punishing. I wish you could hang me as they used to do in the old days for cheating the revenue and stealing.

Nothing would be too bad for me. Oh, why did Rammersammy ever leave me when I was overtook ?”

“Yes, sar ; here, sar. Please, captain, sar, I come !” cried the voice of the faithful servant as he scrambled, like a lean and active lizard, up the steps into the room. In his hand he bore the garments which, under the plea of dhoby, had been so ruthlessly abstracted the night before. Brand turned at the sound of the voice, and a sob shook him.

“You—you—scoundrel ! I shall have to thrash you, you know I shall !” cried Brand, clinging to his factotum. “How can you let me be seen abroad like this ? You call yourself a gentleman’s servant ! I’m ashamed of you !”

Ramaswamy put his arms round his master and gently drew him towards one of the curtained doorways, replying soothingly—

“Yes, sar ; this way, sar. Master, come inside here. Soon making all right, Captain Brand, sar.”

They passed behind the purdah, Brand threatening punishment, Ramaswamy consoling, and disappeared from view.

CHAPTER XXII

TEN days later the big passenger ship in the harbour of Madras was flying the Blue Peter, the signal that her steam was up and that she was ready to continue her homeward journey. The sun was not far from his setting. A glow of golden light lit up the expanse of sand that stretched from the harbour arm to St. Thomé. The sea, calm and peaceful after the first burst of the north-east monsoon, was of a deep sapphire blue, which contrasted strongly with the greeny-brown depths of the harbour. Through the tepid water a turtle swam lazily beneath the ripples, toying with a stray leaf of cabbage or lettuce thrown overboard by a ship's cook. Deeper down the silvery scaleless catfish foraged like jackals for food along the bottom, nothing coming amiss to their greedy maws. Cargo boats, pulled by sinewy boatmen of the muckwa caste, passed to and from the jetty, the rowers chanting at their oars. Every half-hour the bells of the different steamers moored within the harbour rang out the time of day. The creak of the cranes and noisy

beat of the donkey engines—as cargo was lifted in and out of the hold—came from every vessel. Above the busy sound rose the shouts of the coolies and lascars, warning those below to beware of the swinging cases ascending and descending.

The *Golcondah* was taking a large contingent of passengers from Madras, and during the afternoon several parties with their luggage left the pier head. One of the boats held Miss Tregethin and Brand, who, with his servant, had come to see “her ladyship” off.

Brand was unusually quiet and thoughtful. His eyes frequently dwelt on the gay young face that smiled back at him reassuringly. Although Dilys had forgiven him, he found it difficult to forgive himself. To add to his distress she had insisted on placing a sum of money to his credit in the bank. As she did so, she repeated again and again that no amount of gold and silver could repay the debt she owed him. “I deserve it, every bit of it, and worse still,” was all he could say, his bright, cheery manner extinguished in sorrow.

“Dear friend, I can never repay you,” Dilys was saying as the boat drew near to the big hull.

“I am sorry to contradict your ladyship. All I ever hoped to be was a good servant, but I have failed in everything. I haven’t even behaved like a gentleman.”

"I can't allow you to say such things about yourself," cried Dilys, trying in vain to comfort the wounded spirit. "It was just a momentary weakness, and if Mr. Carwardine had not accidentally paid you a visit, no harm would have happened."

"It would have been all right even then if this boy of mine had stayed by me when I was overtook." Brand looked reproachfully at Ramaswamy, whose small black eyes blinked in sorrow for his own shortcomings. "But he has been trying to make amends ever since. I couldn't find it in my heart to beat him, though I told him over and over again that he did ought to be thrashed within an inch of his life for leaving me like that."

"He did his best to remedy the mistake by following you at once."

"He ran, your ladyship, like a hare. The moment he found that I was gone, he guessed that something wrong was up. He grabbed the trousers from the place where he had hidden them and started off, tracking me down towards the fort by hearing from the natives in the road that I had passed that way. As soon as he reached the fort he knew where I had gone. He must have been on the bank of the moat only five minutes behind me."

"Good old friend! There was nothing to be ashamed of in your dress, and you were

quite yourself by the time you reached my room," responded Dilys as she laid her hand on his.

They were nearing the gangway, pushing their way between other craft that were moored to the ship. Brand leaned forward, retaining the hand of his companion, and asked in low, earnest tones—

"Is your ladyship quite satisfied with the step you are about to take?"

"Set your mind at rest on that point, Mr. Brand. I have no doubt about it."

The boat was drawn up to the small landing-stage at the foot of the gangway steps. Coolies ran up and down with luggage on their heads at imminent risk of knocking each other over and dropping their burdens in the sea. Looking up, Dilys saw Marion leaning on the taffrail. With the assistance of Brand, the girl was soon on the landing-stage.

"Bring my chair with you, please. You can unfasten it and find me a comfortable corner on deck."

Brand stepped back into the boat and picked the chair out from beneath the tarpaulin that covered the luggage. As he followed Miss Tregethin up the steps he shouted back to his servant—

"You bide your time, Rammersammy. Hang back a bit till these other boats have cleared

off, or some of her ladyship's luggage will be dropped into the sea."

"Yes, sar ; I know sar," came back above the sound of the yelling coolies.

Owen Davenport as well as Marion and her father had arrived and were on deck. Rex Carwardine had joined them, but they were a silent and somewhat abstracted party when Dilys appeared in their midst. She was in high spirits and bubbling over with fun. It was her first meeting with Owen since she disappeared so suddenly from Bangalore.

"How do you do, dear Beast?" she said with suspicious meekness as she offered her cheek in childlike fashion to the embarrassed lover. Under her eyelashes she shot a glance at Rex, who turned away and took a few steps along the deck. A ripple of laughter fell from her lips as Owen awkwardly saluted her. "Ah! You thought that I would not come! That was why you were so anxious to escort me here. But here I am, and here is my chair. Where is yours?"

"Our chairs are over there," replied Marion, who could not help smiling at Owen's discomfiture. She pointed to a group of seats in a sheltered corner of the deck. One of them was occupied by Mr. Hensley, who was tired with the journey by rail from Cuddalore.

Brand, at the bidding of "her ladyship," cut the cord that bound the folding chair and opened

it out. Dilys drew their attention with much pride to her name, "Miss Tregethin," painted in large black letters on the back.

"Doesn't that look like business?" she cried. "If I am not always sitting in it, you will be able to imagine that I am there with my name written so large."

Brand carried it across to the group and placed it near Mr. Hensley's. Dilys greeted that gentleman with warmth, and he regarded her with interest, having heard her story from his daughter. She seated herself in the chair experimentally.

"Yes, it is very comfortable; it will do admirably. Tell the captain that he may start at once, dear Beast; I am quite ready." Without waiting for Owen's reply, she was up again, her excitement not allowing her to rest a moment. "I want to look at the ship," she cried, turning to her *fiancé*.

"You would like to see your cabin first, wouldn't you?" Davenport asked. "Your berth is number 122."

"Yes, yes; I know the number well enough. I wrote it on all the labels. I want to look over the ship. I shall see plenty of my cabin by-and-by, when the sea is rough."

"Has your luggage come up on deck?" asked Owen.

"Please don't trouble about it. Mr. Brand will have it brought up. This is Mr. Brand. He

is an old friend of mine. I will tell you all about him some time or other."

Brand bowed in his best manner, and smiled with a twinkling eye.

"No use trying to get things up just yet, sir. There's a dozen boats lying round the gangway. My servant is looking after the trunks, and I will go and look after him. Number 122 you said, my lady. I'll see that it is all properly stowed away."

As Brand departed to do his errand, Dilys consented to be shown her cabin. Two ladies were already within the confined space, which seemed half choked with cabin portmanteaux.

"Wait a moment for me in the saloon," said the girl, over her shoulder to her companion as he stood in the alloway. Five minutes later she joined him.

"Is everything comfortable?" he asked.

"It will be when the ship starts," she replied.

"You greeted some one at the cabin door. Do you know any of your travelling companions?"

"Yes; there is a girl from Bangalore I know slightly. She is a Miss Archibald, a governess who has been left stranded in India, poor thing, and is now going back to her people. Oh! this is the music-saloon, is it? Where's the smoking-room? And then I want to see the kitchens and have a peep at the engines."

Chattering and laughing, she bore him along

on the wings of her wilfulness until she had explored the ship. When they returned to Marion, they found her seated by her father. Rex, more silent and uncomfortable than ever, was dimly conscious that he was failing miserably in playing the part that he had formerly filled at Cuddalore. He was gradually awaking to the fact that there was also a change in Marion. Her buoyancy of spirits was gone, and her sense of humour had vanished. He put it down to anxiety concerning her father's health, and blamed himself bitterly for his coldness and want of sympathy. Now and then he tried to express his regret, but the words fell flatly on ears that were manifestly inattentive. It was a relief when Owen brought his companion back from her wanderings.

Dilys had many comments and amusing remarks to make. None of them were addressed to Rex. He sat watching the mobile face, sometimes catching a glimpse of the gipsy girl, and at other moments seeing new traits, which only added fetters to the chain she had already hung about his heart. Marion's abstraction melted away before the warmth of the sunny babbling, and occasionally she laughed heartily, her father joining in. Davenport was carried away by the chaff, frequently directed by Dilys against himself, and laughed with the others.

The sun sank below the horizon of inland palms and buildings. The red towers and

minarets of Madras deepened to rich purple, whilst the sapphire blue of the sea turned to indigo. The sandy shore became a warm plain of red gold on which the muckwas, with their primitive fishing-boats, looked like black dots. Half the fishing fleet had returned. The other half was hurrying under square lug sails, towards the long low rollers that broke in snowy white upon the shore. Quickly the purples changed to black and the gold to brown, as the rosy light of the afterglow died away and darkness came on.

The ship was to sail at seven o'clock, and the bell struck the half-hour before. As the sound was echoed in different parts of the harbour, Brand approached.

"It is half-past six, and I have come to say good-bye to your ladyship," he said.

"Is the luggage all right?" asked Owen.

"Quite right, sir."

Dilys rose with a little exclamation of dismay. "Oh, dear! I am afraid this means good-bye. I can't say good-bye here."

She took his arm, and they moved slowly towards the gangway. No one followed, as all felt that the two would prefer to be without any other company. It was now quite dark upon the water. The boatmen had lighted their dim oil lamps, but they only accentuated the darkness. Brand descended the gangway steps, Dilys still clinging to his arm, as though unwilling to let

him go. "Good-bye, good-bye, dear friend," they heard her say. There was a splash of oars, and Brand's boat disappeared in the direction of the jetty.

Twenty minutes passed, and a bell rang as a signal for visitors to leave the ship, and for the small harbour craft to clear away from the side of the vessel.

So absorbed had the police-officer been in the relation of the story of how Brand had befriended Dilys, and how the old man had let the cat out of the bag after indulging a little too much at the sergeants' ball—Rex omitted the part concerning the gipsy girl—that he had not observed how the time was passing.

"No wonder that she felt the parting with her old friend," cried Marion, as Rex rose at the sound of the bell.

He shook hands with Mr. Hensley and Owen. "I don't see Miss Tregethin. Will you say good-bye for me, as I fear there isn't time now to run down to her cabin," he said, as he pressed Marion's hand.

"One parting is enough for her, poor child," replied Miss Hensley.

"Hurry up, sir, or you will be carried on. We are drawing up the anchor," cried a quartermaster, as he walked forward.

Running down the gangway the police-officer jumped into the boat. It was the only one left,

and by this time had been unmoored, and was attached to the landing-stage by the strong arm only of the boatman. The great engines awoke, and began to pulse with measured beat. The water swirled and eddied under the blades of the propeller, whilst the boatmen pulled vigorously out of the whirlpools.

Marion, leaning once more on the taffrail, waved her hand towards the retreating boat, but her action was lost in the darkness of the night. Slowly the *Golcondah* moved from her moorings and passed out of the harbour. The lights of Madras grew fainter as she swung on her way towards Europe. The dinner-bell rang.

"Will you come down?" asked Owen.

Marion glanced at her father. He had fallen asleep.

"I would rather remain here. Send me up something by one of the stewards. You will probably find Dilys there, so you will not be alone."

He waited till the crowd of passengers had passed down, feeling no inclination to face the strange company.

"How strange to think that we have found the heiress! The last letter I received from my brother tells me that Mrs. Myrtle is making a wonderful recovery. She seems to have taken a new lease of life in her determination to see her niece."

"I congratulate you on the success of your mission. Even if you found her, I never thought for a moment that you would persuade her to come to England—still less to marry you."

"To be honest—neither did I."

There was a short silence. The last passenger had disappeared down the companion stairs, in answer to the call of the dinner-bell. They were alone, except for the sleeping invalid and a couple of lascars, who were coiling ropes on the deck.

"Marion," he cried, with a sudden sharp pang, "how shall we endure the next four weeks, and how will it all end?"

But Miss Hensley made no reply.

CHAPTER XXIII

ON arrival at the pier-head Rex paid the boatmen, hired a gharry, and drove to the club where he was staying. He had taken five days' casual leave, three of which were gone. The other two slipped by all too fast, and on the evening of the fifth he travelled up to Cuddalore by the night train.

The next morning found him absorbed in his work, which fortunately was always interesting, so much so, that it was a rare thing for him to take any leave. As usual with his temperament, the day passed without any temptation to indulge in vain regrets. By the broad light of the sun, aided by reason, he determined to forget the gipsy girl, and when the summer came he would go home and marry Marion, who was in every way suitable for the wife of a Government official. But at night, when the work of the office was put aside, his thoughts were not so easily controlled. He fought bravely against memory the first evening after his arrival home. On the second he was less severe with himself.

He yielded to temptation, and wandered through the gateway of his compound. Instinctively he bent his steps towards the spot where he had recovered consciousness after the attack by the dogs.

All was quiet, except for the murmur of the sea, the chirp of the grasshoppers, and the cry of the stray sea-bird. He looked towards the moat, and wondered if the boat was still lying amid stream. He felt inclined to ferry himself up to "my lady's bower," but dismissed the thought as being foolish, considering that he had no light. To-morrow he would see Brand, and ask if he would sell him the fittings of the chamber ; his desire was that the room might be left intact. Then he wondered idly whether the girl had taken any active part in the smuggling which had been going on. He came to the conclusion that she had had no share in it. Her crime consisted in screening the criminals. And therein he was right. Brand's peculiar sense of honour would have been sufficient guard against "her ladyship" being involved in any difficulty of that kind. Though the old man had taken care that she was never without a flask of the very best cognac, in case of need, he had never allowed either her dwelling or her own person to afford any aid in the contraband traffic.

The identification of the Dilys on board the *Golcondah*, the Miss Tregethin of the hidden

chamber, and the gipsy girl of the glaxis, was a dangerously fascinating occupation for thoughts that refused to be controlled. In which character had she been most charming? There was no doubt about the answer. It was as the gipsy that she had shown her softest moods, when she pleaded in vain for her foster-brother, standing under the wheels of his dog-cart, and when she bound his arm with gentle touch and tender pity.

Yet the memory was not without its bitterness. She had so manifestly played with him and amused herself. Now she had thrown him aside, and turned with the irresponsibility of a child to a new toy, in the shape of his friend Owen. The hot blood flew to his face as the conviction forced itself upon him, that her treatment of him was no more than he deserved. It would only have complicated matters had she showed herself to be serious in her coquetry. He laughed, as the thought struck him, that it would have been odd if he had appropriated the heiress whom Owen had come out to India to seek and to marry. His laugh was echoed behind him in light, mocking tones. He started visibly, bewildered, incredulous.

“Looking for the gipsy girl, Mr. Carwardine?” asked a well-remembered voice, ringing with suppressed merriment.

He caught his breath, believing for a moment that imagination was playing him a trick. But it

was no trick. There in the starlight stood the gipsy girl, her eyes shining with mischief and delight, in her maddest, merriest, most fascinating mood. She was robed in the folds of a gipsy cloth, but her face and hands were unstained. The English skin showed pearly white in the starlight, and the colour that lives only in the cheek of the European mounted to her very brow.

Neither was it a trick of the fancy that filled in the next five minutes.

“How did you come here?” he asked presently, wonderment betraying itself in his voice.

“Do the girls in England leave the men they love when there is no need? No, a thousand times, no! If you tell me that they do, I will not believe you. Does Miss Hensley leave the man she loves when she sails on the broad ocean? No, a thousand times, no! She takes him with her. Ah! Pearl of my heart,” she cried, dropping into the endearments which she had learnt in her babyhood from her foster-mother. “Have no fear that the gods are working ill. You are mine, mine alone, and no one will dispute my right, least of all the couple sailing on the *Golcondah*.”

He listened, scarcely daring to believe his ears.

“Tell me, how did you manage to leave the ship? Surely I saw you on board, you and your chair.”

She laughed with the glee of a mischievous child.

"Quite right! You saw me and my chair. I thought that the chair would be a sufficient blind, if the suspicion should cross their minds that I might play them the same trick that I played my aunt. But they were so absorbed in each other that I need not have troubled. It was all disappointingly easy with the help of Mr. Brand and his old servant."

"So he befriended you once again."

"And will do so to the end. But imagine the scene there must have been when I was first missed. The dear Beast would think that I had jumped overboard. Oh! I do hope they stopped the ship to look for me! Then they would search more closely in the cabin, and discover that I had given my berth to a poor governess from Bangalore, who was longing, just longing, to go back to England, but had not the means. Mr. Brand had the ticket transferred that very morning by the agents. Then, some time after that, they would find my letter, which I hid under the pillow in berth 122. It is to Marion, and I have told her the truth, which she is to remember every time that she looks upon my empty chair."

"And what is the truth, beloved?" he whispered.

"Light of my eyes! can you not read it

for yourself? It is the same story that Mr. Davenport reads every time he looks in Marion's eyes."

* * * * *

Three months later, when letters had been exchanged and explanations offered—which need not be set down here—a wedding took place at St. John's, Bangalore. It was in no respect what might be termed a society function, and on that account, perhaps, no record was made of the number of bridesmaids, nor of the presents, nor of the dresses worn on the occasion. Yet the bride was young, beautiful, and wealthy, and the bridegroom held a responsible position in the Indian Police Force.

After the ceremony there was a reception in the garden of the little bungalow standing on the edge of the plateau. The golden sunlight and quivering blue haze still glorified the wide expanse of boulders, cactus, and green fields in that region of perpetual summer.

The wedding-party was not large, but it included a strange gathering of guests. Conspicuous amongst them was Mrs. Myrtle, lately arrived with her husband from England. She wore a magnificent toilette, which reflected dignity and honour upon the bride. She was her nearest relative, and though aged and enfeebled by a long illness, she was beaming with happiness. Her triumph in having found her niece, and her pride

in the marriage, gave her new life. She was consoled by the thought that the strange caprice and wilfulness of her niece—all the result of her brother's folly in trusting his daughter to the care of a wild tribe of gipsies—might have led to disastrous results.

Another guest, less apparent, but none the less joyful, was an old, lame gipsy woman, tearful and smiling, apologetic and affectionate, proud yet humble, who remained in the back verandah or hovered round the door of the bride's dressing-room. Occasionally she was overcome by fits of intense shyness, when she took refuge behind the portly person of Mrs. Bullen, whom she addressed as Raneë, much to that lady's gratification.

Mrs. Bullen, in a new silk cloth and purple satin skirt, was resplendent with jewels. Not content with her own, she had borrowed right and left, until her ample person was a pyramid of "barbaric pearl and gold." A seat of honour had been provided for her in the little drawing-room, from whence at a distance she could watch the festivities in the garden. When the wedding cake was cut she was not forgotten, and a cup of fragrant coffee took the place of champagne. Daisy, smiling and happy in a white silk dress, far exceeding in splendour the "barl-dress" of grenadine, acted the part of bridesmaid. She played her part with grace, and many ejaculations of "Oh! my! now," when she was called upon to

hold the gloves and bouquet of the bride. Poor little Daisy had not been without her share of trouble. The sudden departure of the regiment prevented Barnes from paying the momentous visit, which was to have been made the morning after the ball. Then came rumours of Moplah obstinacy and fanaticism, with the death of one or two men in the corps. Sleepless nights were passed, and many tears were shed, whilst Bullen in his old age looked on at a new aspect of war which had never before been presented to his view. "That fare a harder job to have to sit here and listen to her sobs than ever that was to hear the bullets a-whizzing about my head," he confided to Brand. But the clouds rolled by in a few weeks. Order was restored amongst the Moplahs, and the regiment returned to Bangalore. Bullen, at Brand's suggestion, followed it. The young Bullens were requiring a better school than Cuddalore offered, and Daisy's happiness hung on the renewal of relations with the gallant corporal, now promoted to be sergeant.

Foremost in the revels was the host, John Elton Brand, Esq., who also played the part of "father" to the bride. A black frock coat, a pair of grey trousers, and a silk hat made him a formidable rival in appearance to the bridegroom himself. When he was first asked to take such an important part in the ceremony, the old man was overwhelmed with pride and modesty. Mr.

Myrtle was the proper person, he said, to fill that position. But that complacent individual was more than content to waive all right to the honour ; and when the bride renewed her request, Brand was almost moved to tears.

“After being such a traitor ! Your ladyship is too kind !”

With glistening eye he at length consented, and having done so he realized that he was about to arrive at the proudest moment of his life.

In behaviour and courtliness of manner John Elton Brand, Esq., surpassed himself, whilst his faithful factotum, Ramaswamy, in a turban that looked like an abnormally large turnip, excelled all past efforts in the serving of champagne and cake.

The company had gathered round the bride with brimming glasses, waiting for the toast. Brand stepped forward, glass in hand to give it. He spoke affectionately, but deferentially of her ladyship, and expressed his satisfaction in seeing how her friends had rallied round her. Whilst he spoke he rested one hand on his hip, pushing aside the frock coat, so that the grey trousers might be brought into view in all their splendour. In the other hand he held his glass of champagne, which now and then he raised, and gracefully waved before him to emphasize his words.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he concluded, “I am going to ask you to drink the health of the bride and bridegroom in this excellent champagne

—it is not Lumbadee borne, sir, I assure you ; ” this as an aside to the bridegroom. “ I must remind you, ladies and gentlemen, that when we give our love and friendship to a lady, we give it also to those whom she may love. There is no knowing with the fair sex how strange the objects of their love may be ; but whatever they are, as men and gentlemen, we are bound to respect their choice. Her ladyship has chosen the police. From henceforth we must follow the police, and work with, and not against, the arm of the law. I ask you all to drink to the happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Carwardine.”

A chorus of cheers, led by Sergeant Barnes, followed the words, and under cover of the noise, Bullen turned to Daisy, who was thinking of a future similar ceremony which was drawing near, and said—

“ Now, wasn’t that a rare old masterpiece ! What I always say about Mr. Brand is, that he *is* such a gentleman.”

THE END

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